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REMEMBERING

CHUCK BERRY

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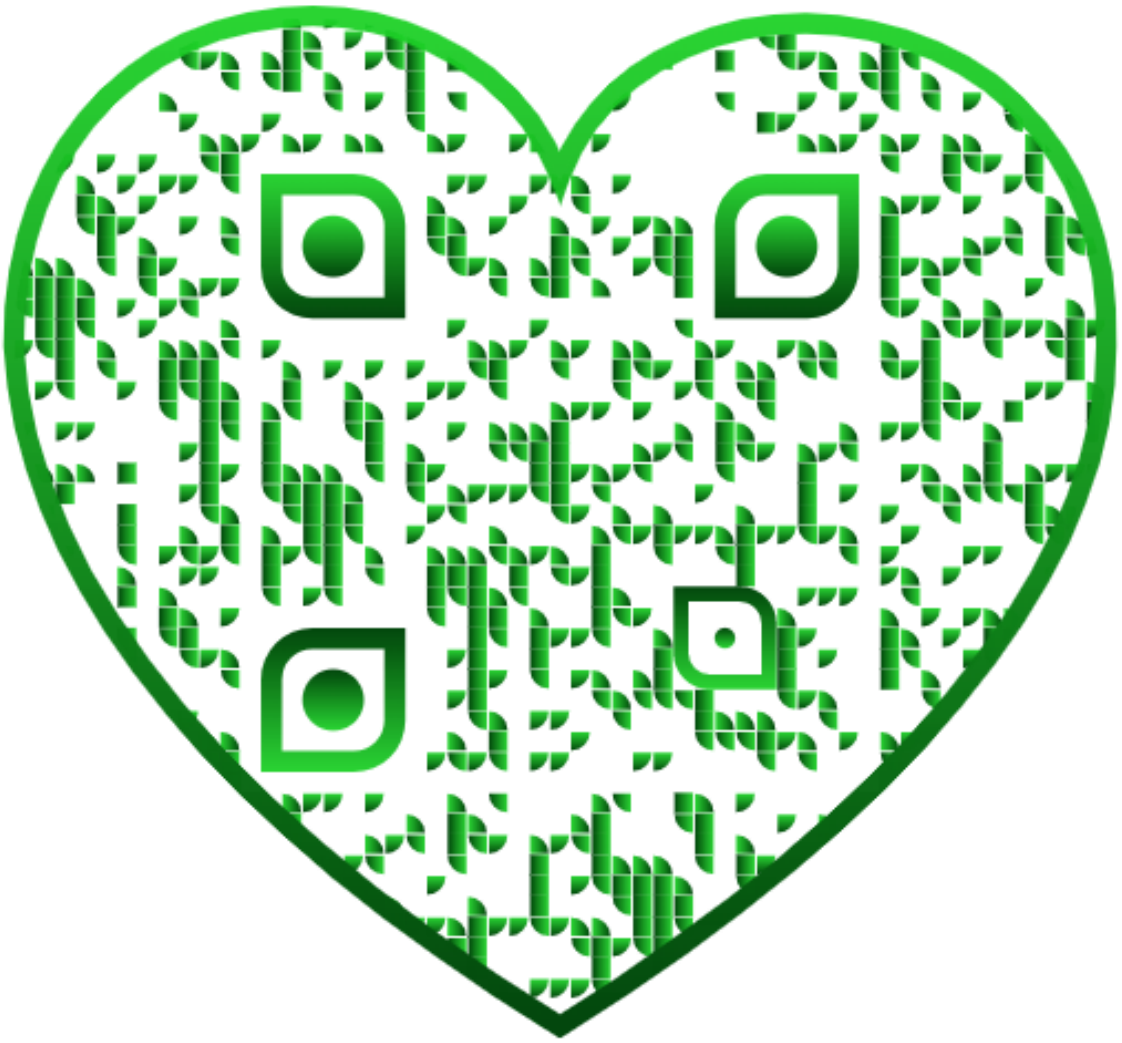

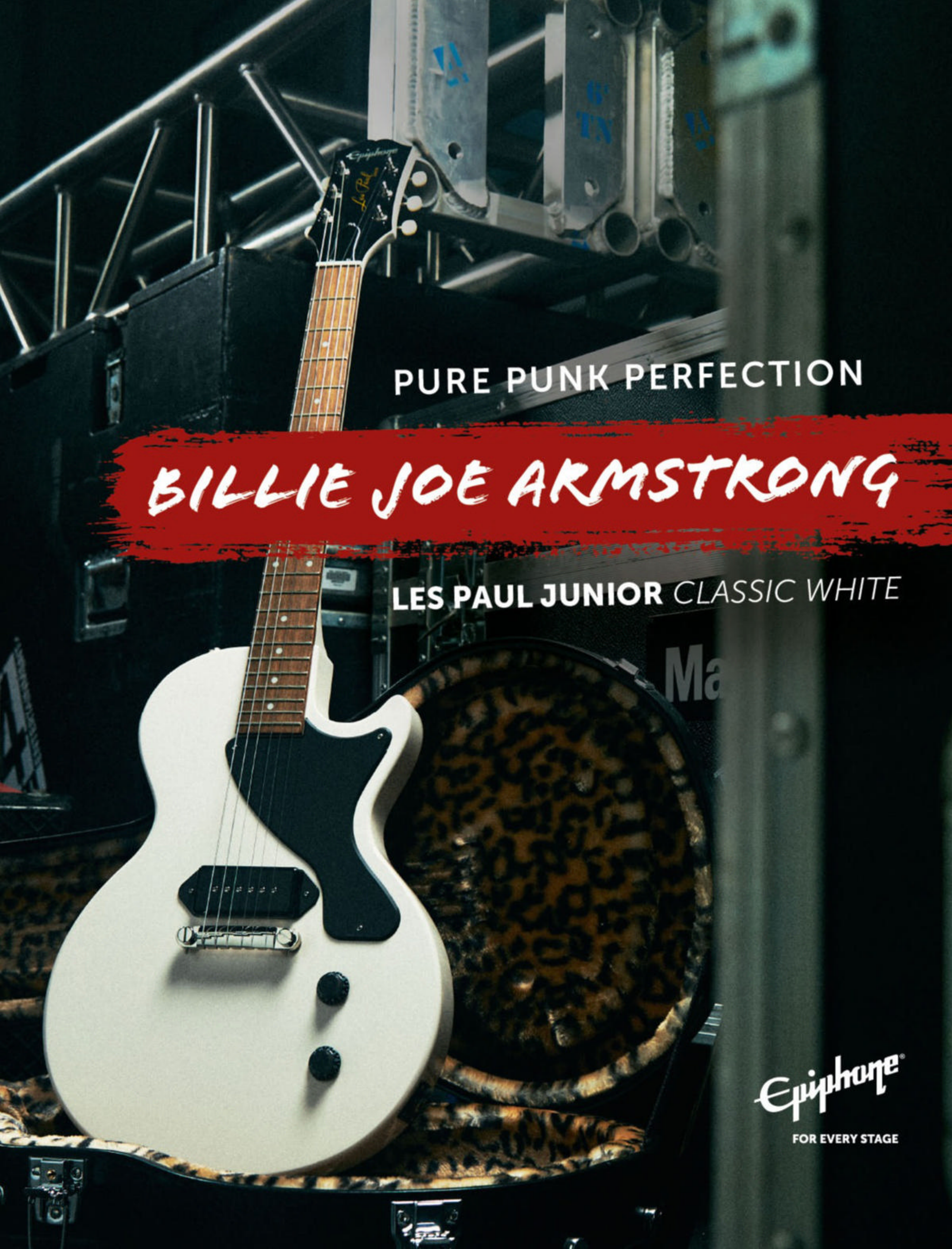
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SCHOOL DAYS

THE SCENE MAY be better known today than the film in which it appears. Midway through *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*, Taylor Hackford's 1987 documentary about Chuck Berry's star-studded 60th birthday concert, Keith Richards convinces the guitar icon to let him take the lead on "Carol" during a rehearsal of the 1958 hit song. It was a tune Richards knew well, a Chuck cut that became a staple of the Rolling Stones' set list in the 1960s. As Keith breaks into the opening riff, Berry stops him to make what seems a minor correction to a double-stop slur near the top of the fourth measure. "That slur is starting right here," Chuck says as he demonstrates. It takes Keith a few tries before he performs it to Berry's satisfaction — "Perfect!" Chuck tells him enthusiastically — but as the song progresses beyond the intro, Keith messes up. They start again, stop, and make another attempt, but Keith quickly forgets what he's just been shown. Chuck taps him on the shoulder, and the music lurches to a halt. "You wanna get it right, let's get it right!" he says pointedly.

It's a tense moment — the exacting master and the heedless student — and the anxiety it induces is evident in the musicians' faces. After all, Chuck could be famously short tempered. But the scene is instructive of more than the proper way to play the well-known opener. Like so many guitarists, Keith regards Chuck's riffs as open to interpretation: Hit the notes and add your own articulation and personality — rough and sloppy, in Keith's case. But this is Chuck's band, and this is Chuck's music. Never mind that the concert under preparation was Keith's idea, or that he is its musical director. Where Chuck Berry is concerned, every note matters.

Therein lies the heart of his music. Chuck's 1950s catalog may have given birth to the shaggy monster of rock and roll, but his music was defined by precision. Each song is a story, succinct but vivid with exacting detail, and told in Chuck's most perfect diction. The riffs and licks are similarly clear and declarative, providing an emotional core to the narrative. In creating the roots of rock and roll from disparate genres, Chuck used similar exactitude, drawing specific musical elements — T-Bone Walker's double-stops, the twang of country and the stinging licks of the blues — to concoct the formula that would propel rock and roll forward and inspire everyone from the Beatles and the Rolling Stones to Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen.

Keith Richards surely meant no disrespect to Chuck's music. He was and remains a Chuck Berry superfan. But his down-and-dirty handling of a jewel from rock and roll's seminal catalog is a reminder of just how ragged and abused those riffs became over the years as they were assimilated by other guitarists and regurgitated like misspoken quotes. It's worth spending time with those original recordings to hear them played exactly as the master intended.

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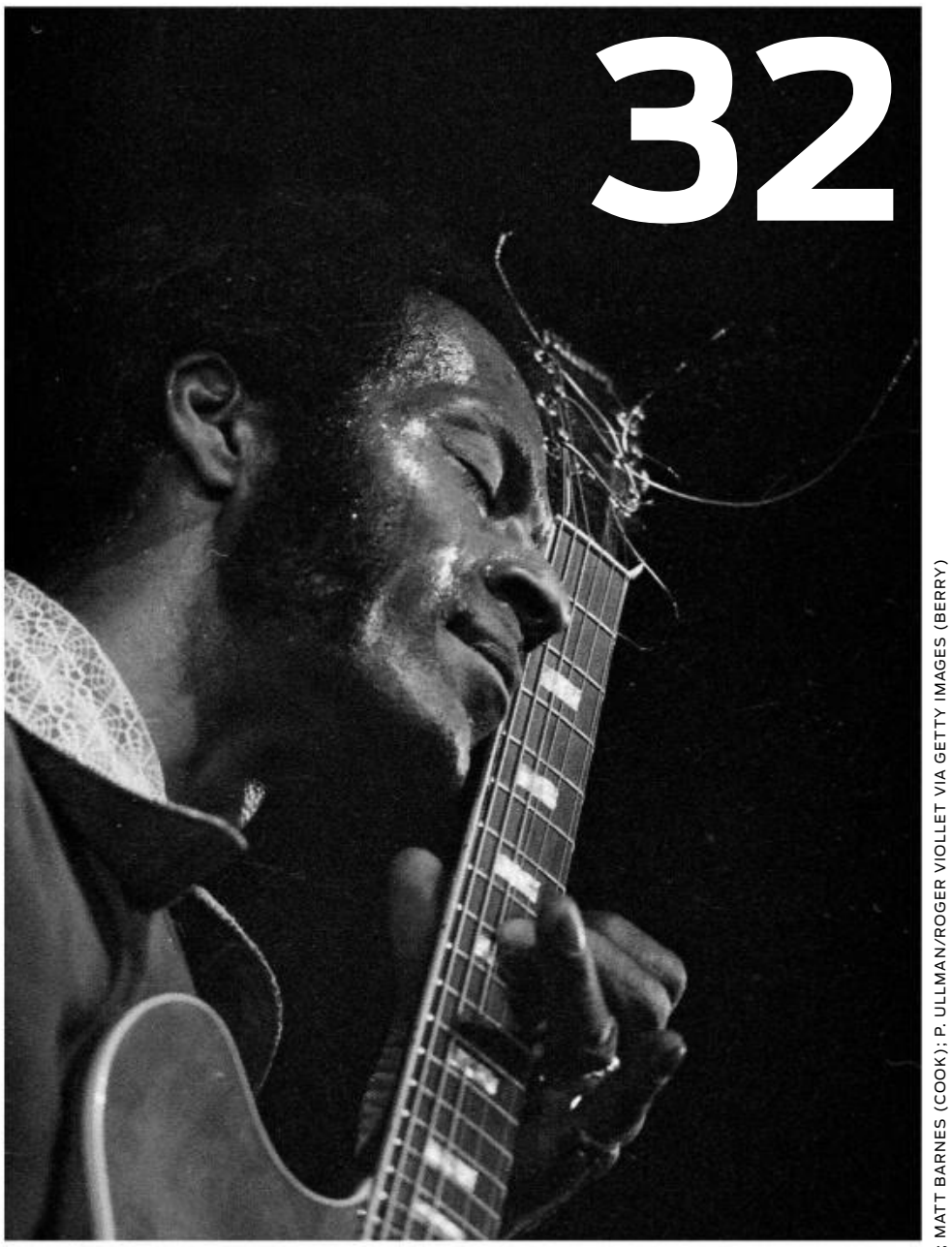

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ON THE COVER
Chuck Berry circa 1958
Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images)

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The Matchless Laurel Canyon 1x12 combo

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

The new Matchless Laurel Canyon and Coldwater Canyon amps capture classic West Coast splendor.

BY DAVE HUNTER PHOTOGRAPHS BY ZACH WISH

AS A HIGHLY RESPECTED forerunner in the sector, Matchless has enjoyed a lifetime membership in the pantheon of boutique guitar amplifiers. Yet in all its 32 years, this is the first time the company has offered production models based on 6V6 output tubes. The Laurel Canyon and Coldwater Canyon deliver two variations on an American-toned theme, yet both still scream Matchless through and through.

First delivered in 1989 by Mark Sampson and his production partner Rick Perotta, the Matchless flagship DC30 combo represented the company's take on a more roadworthy AC30, and the California maker's sonic predilections have leaned toward the other side of the pond ever since. The company went bankrupt in 1998 but sprang back to life with a vengeance in 2000, with Phil Jamison, who'd started with Matchless in 1992, taking the helm as chief operating officer. That's the position he's retained ever since, and while the company itself has continued to craft its reputation on hand-built, American-made renditions of British-flavored tone machines, he's also brought a lot of innovation to the format in the years since.

While they're outwardly a pair of meat-and-potatoes, get-the-job-done tube amps, the dynamic duo we're checking out in this issue arguably represents one of the biggest changeups of the Matchless formula to date. Both are made using the same entirely hand-wired, point-to-point build techniques and high-end components that we've come to know from three decades of their predecessors, and they follow Matchless's ostensibly Class A ethos, too, striving for maximum dynamics and articulation. But the Laurel Canyon and Coldwater Canyon both use a pair of 6V6GTs in the output stage for around 20 watts of American-toned sonic splendor, and their circuits have also been voiced from the ground up to capture the West Coast sounds that give them their name. Let's dig in and take a closer look.

Laurel Canyon 1x12 Reverb Combo

It would be easy to look at the Laurel Canyon's features and say, "Hey, it's just Matchless's updated Deluxe Reverb, minus the tremolo!" That's especially true when the amp comes supplied as a 1x12 combo with the optional tube-driven spring reverb, as our review sample did. But there is certainly more here than meets the eye.

The Laurel Canyon (shown this page) is very much its own thing. Says Phil Jamison, "It's kind of a spin on what we're famous for."

The amp delivers similar wattage through the same 6V6GTs as Fender's club classic, and certainly there are regions of the aural Venn diagram where the two overlap. But this new midsized amp from Jamison's drawing board is very much a thing unto itself, even if it's designed to recapture the classic American tones that on occasion were produced by its Fullerton-born predecessor. The control panel offers controls for volume, bass, mid, treble, master and reverb, with a passive FX loop, a jack for the reverb foot switch, and four- and eight-ohm speaker outputs around back.

Of the two new amps, the Laurel Canyon was the first to come off the design table, and it's clear this one really floats Jamison's boat.

"Right now it's one of my most favorite amps," he tells us. "I think it's just because it's something different. It's such a departure from that EL84 sound, and it doesn't sound like a Clubman or a Chieftain. It's just got its own thing going on. It's kind of a spin on what we're famous for, but it's got a midrange control instead of being fixed [*i.e. without a control*]. And I've changed quite a bit of the circuit for a specific sound that I was going for, kind of that crash-and-burn '66 thing. It came out amazing. You could listen to the Jackson Browne song 'Somebody's Baby,' and it completely captures that kind of vibe. It nails the old Neil Young stuff. Rolling Stones, too. I was really going for the whole essence of the Laurel Canyon sound, the tone of players back in the late '60s and '70s who were in that scene."

Jamison also changed up the cab design for this new offering, rendering it a little closer to square than the wider-bodied cabs of other 20-watt models. The speaker is a 12-inch Celestion G12H75 Creamback wearing the proprietary Matchless green plastic magnet cover. All of which is to say, it looks entirely Matchless, even if slightly tweaked. Probe the details and it's even more so: The hefty custom U.S.-made transformers, the base clamps for the two 6V6GTs and 5AR4 rectifier, the two-stage light-up logo plate and control panel, and the confidence-inspiring weight — 46 pounds for a relatively compact 1x12 20-watter — all signal that Matchless still builds 'em like they used to.

Teamed up with a white-guard Fender Telecaster, the Laurel Canyon felt immediately at home, with everything from trenchant yet sparkling twang to crunchy Stones-esque rhythm chunk springing effortlessly from the pumping Celestion. This amp will do the shimmer-and-bloom that Matchless amps are noted for, with that euphonically enhanced high-end shine bouncing sonic sparklers around the room. But it also has a little more midrange hair and girth than some of its dual-EL84 brethren — which is to say, yes, something identifiably 6V6-fueled and distinctly American.

A Novo Serus J with P-90s traded a tad of that shimmer for more toothsome grit,

The Coldwater Canyon (shown this page) ups the ante with high-gain circuits in the front end and the new 6V6 back end.

especially with the volume advanced to around 11 o'clock, while keeping notes clear and articulate. And with a Gibson 1959 Les Paul Reissue, the amp started to sing and drive a little earlier on the dial, then delivered roaring cranked-vintage-style lead tones when wound up to one o'clock or beyond, revealing a surprisingly fiery beast under the hood when you need it. Within all this versatility, further aided by the three-knob cathode-follower EQ's wide and powerful range, the amp just exudes class throughout. The crystalline detail can be alarming at first, especially for those who haven't played a Matchless before, but once you get used to it, many other amps sound squelched and dull by comparison.

Along with all that, the thing is superbly dynamic and stunningly quiet at idle. The reverb sounds lush and rich, and the master control works surprisingly well, enabling the Laurel Canyon to suit the room at smaller club gigs the way some notoriously loud, punchy Matchless amps of old couldn't. Which is to say, if Phil's excited about this one, we can easily see why.

Coldwater Canyon Head

Hot on the heels of the debutante 6V6-er comes the Coldwater Canyon, tested here in the non-reverb head format. It leans considerably hotter than the Laurel Canyon, with a nod toward contemporary high-gain circuits in the front end, while it retains Jamison's new American-inspired back end.

"The Coldwater Canyon's circuit is cascading gain," he explains. "The only similarity is the output section; the preamps are wildly different. On the Coldwater Canyon, the gain and volume are very cool. Gain down with volume up is very Plexi, and gain up is very gainy. It can do the early ZZ Top stuff well, and with reverb in the loop it will nail Van Halen I."

The control complement is similar to that of the Laurel Canyon, with the addition of the gain control, which governs the amount of signal fed into an added 12AX7 gain stage. Otherwise, construction is also very similar, although the test sample includes dual speaker outs with a three-way impedance switch, alongside the FX loop's send and return. The solid, compact head cab makes this thing an easy carry, and a stealthy monster that your bandmates won't see coming.

"I WAS REALLY GOING FOR THE WHOLE ESSENCE OF THE LAUREL CANYON SOUND, THE TONE OF PLAYERS BACK IN THE LATE '60S AND '70S WHO WERE IN THAT SCENE"

As Jamison indicates, the Coldwater Canyon has a lot more roar and grind available when you want it, all of which can be constrained through the effective master control, or given full rein in larger rooms. Tested using the Les Paul and Telecaster through a closed-back 1x12 with an Eminence CV-75 and an open-back 2x12 with a pair of Scumback J75s, this little amp revealed a big, thick, American-toned voice when set to the edge of breakup, but I also dialed in some of its sibling's sparkling clean tones with the gain knob set down to just enough to let the signal through.

With the volume advanced to elicit its own breakup, a cranked black-panel Fender came immediately to mind, certainly, but there's also a dollop of tweed-meets-Vox in there, for an enticingly tasty breed of old-school overdrive. Start pushing the gain, however, and it gets throaty and raw real fast, becoming a lead machine with very much its own sound and feel. Singing, hot, aggressive, and just a hair loose in the lows, it's more hot-rodded-vintage to my ears than some replication of a slick high-gainster of the Boogie, Soldano or Bogner camps — and that's something many players looking for original tones in that direction will no doubt appreciate.

However you define it, the Coldwater Canyon is tasty, dynamic and addictive stuff, and another winner in an appealing new pair from Matchless.

CONTACT matchlessamplifiers.com
PRICES Laurel Canyon 1x12 combo with reverb $2,780; Coldwater Canyon head, $2,550

ROYAL TREATMENT

Blues phenom Eric Gales returns with the album he was born to make: *Crown*.

BY MARK McSTEA

Eric Gales with his Magneto Sonnet Raw Dawg

KATRENA WIZE

ERIC GALES' NEW album, *Crown* (Provogue Records), is a serious statement of intent. So is its lead-off track, "I Want My Crown," which features a showdown with blues-rock maestro Joe Bonamassa, who co-produced the record. Some years back, Gales and Bonamassa were teen prodigies, with the kind of chops that the average guitarist could spend a lifetime trying to obtain, but their careers took a different trajectory. Bonamassa's career has gone from strength to strength, whereas Gales lost direction during years of struggle with substance abuse.

"I had been aware of Joe's progress, and I was a little frustrated that my career hadn't kept pace, due to a lot of self-destructive behavior," Gales reflects. "Maybe if I hadn't taken a left turn when I did, things would have been different."

Now five years clean and making the best music of his career, Gales is hungry to make up for lost ground. The idea of hooking up with his peer came to Gales after jamming with him several years ago, when Bonamassa told him he wasn't fulfilling his potential.

Gales, who says he has always followed Bonamassa's career and enjoyed his work, notes that his feelings of regret weren't tinged with bitterness but a desire to do better. He is philosophical about the path his career has taken and the choices that he made, with a sanguine belief that perhaps whatever happens is meant to be, and is part of what makes someone who they are both as a person and an artist. He is certain that the music he has made while clean is undoubtedly the best in his catalog, and he is justifiably proud of the new record, which certainly raises the benchmark for blues in the 21st century. Gales has taken influences ranging from Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan to classic rock, R&B and rap to create a unique, urban-flavored take on blues that has the ability to capture a much wider audience than the traditional blues market.

This is a long album. I guess it would have been a double album back in the days of vinyl.

It is actually coming out as a double album on vinyl. I think it is unquestionably the best album that I have ever recorded. I like a lot of different things, and I got the chance to showcase everything that I wanted to cover. I had a lot of songs, and I thought why not just put everything on the album.

There's a lot of funk and organic sounds on the record. This could just as easily have been released in 1973. I think that makes it timeless, as those sounds never age.

That's a great comment, because there was some good shit coming down back then. I am very humbled that you picked up on that. It means a lot to me man, because that is what I really feel like I was trying to bring to the record.

Gales and Joe Bonamassa onstage at Keeping the Blues Alive at Sea, August 19, 2019

The opening song, "Death of Me," lays out your sonic blueprint. It sounds a little like Hendrix playing classical music with nods to rap and R&B.

You got it exactly right. I used my Magneto custom model [*Sonnet Raw Dawg*] for that one. It has a real strong tone. There's also a new affordable version available, the RD3 [*$1,595*]. You can buy it exclusively through my website [*ericgales.com*]. I've got back orders out the ying-yang for them at the moment. [*laughs*]

The track that will draw the most attention is the lead-off single, "I Want My Crown." There's an interesting story in the lyrics about how you feel that you haven't achieved what you think you should have.

I'm grateful to God above that I'm still here. And who knows? This may have been my path anyway. I'm glad to be able to show people that you can walk through a personal hell and come back even stronger than before. I don't resent Joe's success. I've been one of the biggest cheerleaders for what he's achieved, and he deserves all of the success because he is such a hard worker, and a real nice guy too, of course. We thought very meticulously about how to put the story down lyrically and how we wanted to portray things.

"I FEEL THAT THE FOG HAS LIFTED AND I'M DOING THE BEST THINGS I HAVE EVER DONE"

How did you and Joe trade the solos? Were you together in the studio?

We did them together face to face. All the solos were just off the cuff, with both of us really going for it. I never work out my solos. They are always just whatever comes to me when I'm ready to go. Generally, the first take is the one that I keep.

"You Don't Know the Blues" is a classic "talk the talk, walk the walk" song. And despite the subject matter, it has a great sense of humor. Personally, I managed to tick every box on your list, except going to jail.

[*laughs*] That's great man. It's for everyone to interpret it whatever way they want. I guess there's a line in there for everyone. It covers the whole gamut. It's going to be the second single from the album. It's got a sense of humor. I never take myself too seriously.

"Too Close to the Fire" channels the Curtis Mayfield/Hendrix "Little Wing" chordal style to great effect.

I think that Mayfield style is real expressive, and this was the perfect song for that approach. I really love the feel that Hendrix and Curtis got when they played that way. There's something real spiritual about it.

You really hold back on "My Own Best Friend," playing some great minimal solos where the temptation would be to really wail.

I'm never afraid to lay back and keep something in the tank. I've got a record with 13 songs and three vignettes on it, and I like to show variation. I've got more of an Eric Johnson vibe on the introduction, and the solo has a touch of Albert King about it. I really like to mix up my influences.

The sequencing of the album feels like a live set. The final track, "I Gotta Go," is a throwback to the kind of thing B.B. King would do at the end of a show.

Exactly. That was our whole purpose, to make it feel like you've been at a live show, and it's time to go by the end. That will be the final song in my live set from now on as well.

Your lyrics are always quite deep. You never go down the simplistic "I love you baby" route. Are you very spiritual?

I grew up with a church background. and it was kind of embedded in me, so I do have a lot of spirituality. It just carries over into everything that I do.

Are you always writing, or do you work around a planned recording project?

You never know when a groove or an idea will hit you, so I always just grab the phone and record things. Just capturing the moment is important. You can always work it up into something more later on.

You've been clean for five years. Has that carried over into a clarity of vision when it comes to your music as well?

Absolutely. I feel that the fog has lifted and I'm doing the best things I have ever done. I think that we just have to be grateful for the path we're on, and we all have to make sure that we try to keep ourselves true to who we are at all times. There is a depth of heart and soul that comes from life experiences that we don't have when we are younger; there is a spiritual heaviness. The power of music to heal is everything. If you keep faith in the music, it won't let you down.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Crown

"Death of Me," "I Want My Crown," "My Own Best Friend," "Too Close to the Fire," "I Gotta Go"

Bob Mould performs at Bumbershoot, in Seattle, September 1, 2013

MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

Alt-rock pioneer Bob Mould selects the key cuts from his 40-year career with Hüsker Dü and Sugar and as a solo artist.

BY JOE BOSSO

OVER A REMARKABLE 40-year career as a member of the bands Hüsker Dü and Sugar, and as a solo artist, Bob Mould has garnered his fair share of huzzahs and hosannas. His aggressive and highly dramatic signature guitar style was famously admired — and emulated — by bands like the Pixies and Nirvana, among others, and a number of his albums have topped critics' polls and "greatest records of all time" lists.

All of which the 61-year-old singer-songwriter and guitarist takes with healthy doses of humility and perspective. "I think I'm the same as any musician," he says. "I'm grateful when anyone pays attention to the work I do, let alone when colleagues or other people make such wonderful comments about it. To me, it all goes back to when I heard the first Ramones album and thought, Wow, anybody can do this. That's no slight to the Ramones; I'm just talking about the simplicity and beauty of it. To go from that day to today, talking about 'greatest albums of all time' — that's quite a leap and a stretch."

Abrasive and bruising guitar work has long dominated Mould's oeuvre, although there have been fascinating detours into introspective, acoustic-based songs and even a dalliance with electronic music. "I like to try new things occasionally, particularly if I've stayed at one thing too long," he explains, "but I always seem to come back to a sound that I adopted back in my youth." At the center of it all is his artful, muscular rhythm guitar playing — earth-moving stuff crafted from equal parts British Invasion (Pete Townshend looms large here) and New York punk. "I'm pretty comfortable saying that I excel at rhythm guitar," he says, "even more so as I get older and age affects the way that I play and the fury I put into it."

Mould points out that a strong, economical rhythmic sense was essential in his early Hüsker Dü days. "We were a three-piece, so automatically I had to cover a lot of sonic ground, even when I was taking a solo," he says. "That began to inform my songwriting, knowing that I could only solo a certain way. That's something Townshend did with the Who. Suddenly you're writing a lot in E, A, D, G and B — keys where you can build chord structures and still have the I chord or the IV or V chord resonating as you're playing a solo. You write to fit your playing."

Throughout his Hüsker Dü years, Mould played a Flying V–shaped Ibanez Rocket Roll

TIMOTHY HIATT/GETTY IMAGES

In Chicago, shortly after switching to a Fender Stratocaster, May 14, 1989

that he purchased on a whim at a music store. "I was a big New York Dolls fan, and this store had a poster of Syl Sylvain playing a Rocket Roll," he recalls. "I looked at the poster, turned around and saw the very same guitar on sale. I was like, 'I'll take that one.'"

At the end of Hüsker Dü, Mould began playing Fender Stratocasters. His first was a similar impulse buy, but it led to a decades-long association with the model. "I walked into a music store and saw this blue Strat. I asked the guy if I could play it, and he said, 'Sure. What kind of amp do you want to put it through?' I said, 'No, no, I don't need an amp. I just want to check the guitar out.' And within 15 seconds of playing it, I knew it was the guitar."

He underscores this point. "Anybody who's looking to buy an electric guitar, don't worry about the electric part. Pick up the guitar and play a few chords unamped. You'll know right away if it has something to say. You'll know if it feels right. You can deal with pickups and knobs and things later. Concentrate on the wood of the guitar. If it feels good and sounds good unamped, you can figure out the rest."

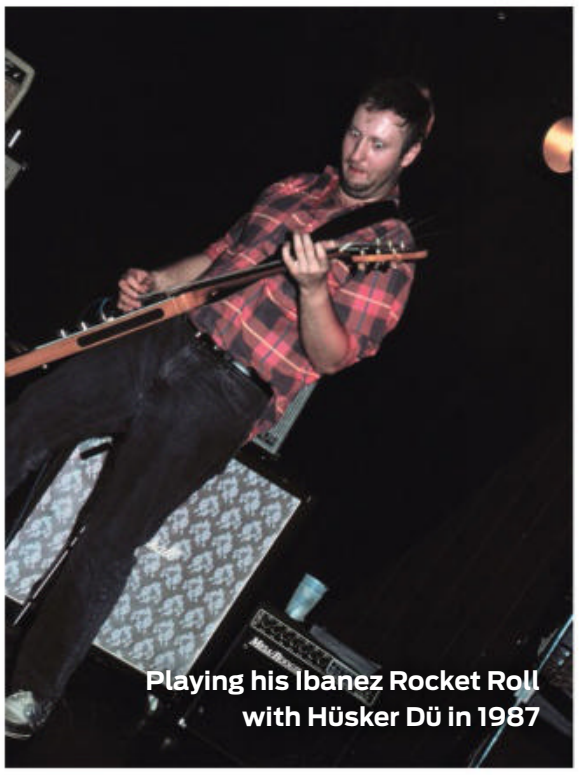
Here, Mould discusses five songs from his brilliant career.

SOMETHING I LEARNED TODAY
HÜSKER DÜ, *ZEN ARCADE* (1984)

"We were prolific. I mean, we were writing constantly. We were in this cycle in that you write enough songs to have what you think is an album. Then you record the album and wait a few months for it to come out. Then you tour to show people these new songs in the live setting. When you finish the tour, you write new songs to record a new album, and you keep repeating that.

"'Something I Learned Today' was a great opener for *Zen Arcade*. Technically, that first-position B chord could be described as a hallmark chord of mine. I think I've exhausted every possible permutation of how you could write an entire song without ever moving off of that chord.

"This song is a perfect example of that, where I've basically frozen the D and G strings in that first-position B, and I'm playing the bass part on the two lower strings. I do all of that without ever moving from that position. I could also leave the high B and sometimes sneak in the high E completely open, and I've got the two middle strings frozen as the foundation of the chord. At the same time, I can walk all of the chord changes around with the lower two strings. So that's the hallmark. I've lost count of how many songs I've written in that position."



Playing his Ibanez Rocket Roll with Hüsker Dü in 1987

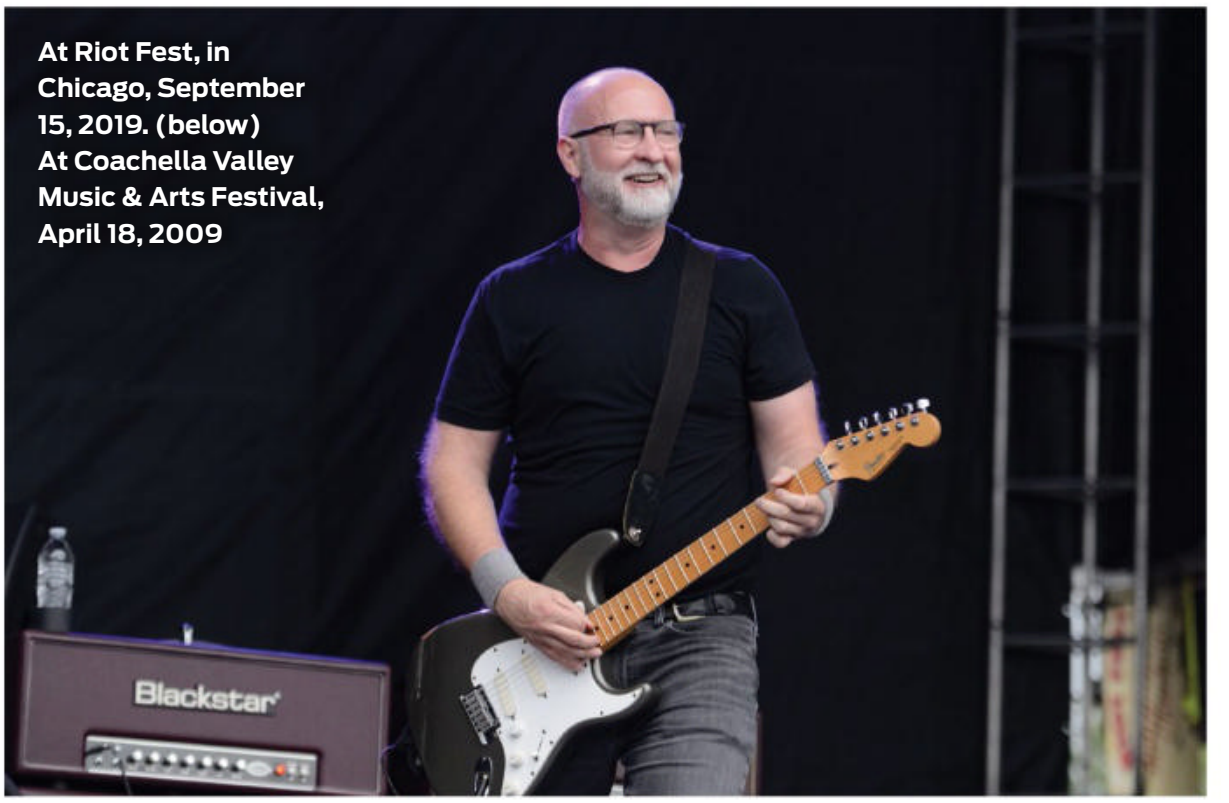
JIM STEINFELDT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (1987); PAUL NATKIN/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES (1989)

"FIRST-POSITION G — IT ALL STARTS AND ENDS THERE. IT'S AMAZING HOW MANY SONGS YOU CAN WRITE WITH IT"

CELEBRATED SUMMER
HÜSKER DÜ, *NEW DAY RISING* (1985)

"It was a pretty logical extension of the pop sensibility that we started showing on *Metal Circus* [*the group's 1983 E.P.*]. There was some melodic stuff on that album, but on *New Day Rising* we amplified those moments and began to move away from the augmented dissonant songs and hardcore songs, like we did on some of the *Zen Arcade* stuff. I hope it wasn't a stretch or a surprise. I thought it made sense for the band.

"In the middle of the song, there's a break in which I played a 12-string acoustic. Very Townshend. The whole idea of the song — that sort of triumphant, thematic longing for last summer, or looking forward to next summer — felt like a Townshend idea circa *Quadrophenia* or *Tommy*. To have a complete acoustic break and return to electric fury, and then another denouement — it was more sophisticated than what we had done before. We had used acoustics previously, like on 'Never Talking to You Again,' which is one of [*drummer/singer*] Grant Hart's greatest songs.



At Riot Fest, in Chicago, September 15, 2019. (below) At Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival, April 18, 2009

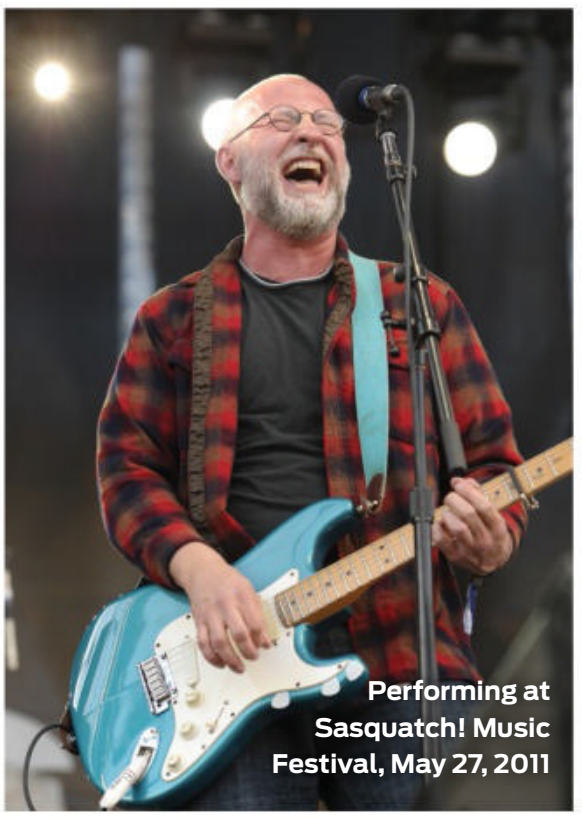
That was all acoustic. Soon we were going back and forth. We'd have an electric part and an acoustic part. It was an evolution of two things we used to do separately."

SUNSPOTS
BOB MOULD, *WORKBOOK* (1989)

"After a while, Hüsker Dü had difficulties, and eventually the difficulties got to the point where it was time for the band to end. I moved to a farm in Northern Minnesota and spent a year in isolation. All I did was feed chickens and relearn how to play the guitar. I would become a different type of musician. I didn't want to start another band that sounded like Hüsker Dü. I wanted to have my own identity, so I started listening to different types of music — Celtic music and Appalachian folk music.

"I had just bought my first Strat, which is still my go-to guitar. From the maple neck and the contour of the body, versus the rosewood neck on the Ibanez 'Flying V' and the shape of the guitar — it all led me to approach the guitar differently. I don't remember when, how or why I wrote 'Sunspots.' I was probably just messing around with neoclassical motifs and trying to learn how to fingerpick. In some ways, the song was really a lesson I gave myself.

"It was a wonderful gift and a great fortune to have a song like this to announce myself to the world, because it was such a stark contrast and a sharp break from what people may have expected. They probably bought the album thinking, Oh, he's going to come out with fury and anger and vindication. And it was the quietest of moments."



Performing at Sasquatch! Music Festival, May 27, 2011

IF I CAN'T CHANGE YOUR MIND
SUGAR, *COPPER BLUE* (1992)

"I started messing with things like alternate tunings and capos. On this song, I capo the neck at the third fret, so it moves what would normally be a cowboy D chord to a cowboy F. The song has been written so many times before. If this were 'My Sweet Lord' for me, I would be fearing a lawsuit from the people who wrote 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight.'

"We recorded the song with my co-producer and co-engineer, Lou Giordano. Typically, I produce my own work and look to my engineers for critiques of performance and things like that. But on this song, Lou said to me, 'Don't you think that guitar solo is a little short?' He started counting it out and said, 'It's only eight bars. It's really beautiful, but it goes by so quickly. Shouldn't you stretch that out?' And I was like, 'Mmm... Nah. It's a pop song. Economical — get in, get out, and let's get home as quick as possible.' Lou really wanted me to double the length, but I was trying to be mindful of pop sensibilities.

"The words are very poignant and heartfelt. And yeah, for somebody who tends to write from the glass half-empty side of things to have a song where the glass is much fuller than half is always a blessing for me. When I get a happy one, I'll gladly take it."

NEXT GENERATION
BOB MOULD, *BLUE HEARTS* (2020)

"'Next Generation' is aspirational. As I was

writing those words in 2019, we were deep in the dark times. I realized that I wanted to look back at those moments in 1983, for instance, when the government and religion conspired to make my life a living hell; that along with feeling that same kind of marginalization being put upon me and anybody who wasn't a rich white hetero male with some kind of weird power in government. All of that ended up being *Zen Arcade*.

"With this song and almost all the *Blue Hearts* album, those old tunes said to me, 'Man, you did all of that with nothing. Go back and take a look at how you did it, not by copying it but just by going back and reflecting on how simple it is to affect change when you really believe in what you're doing and saying.' So I'm taking those feelings from 1983 and updating them in an age-appropriate and society-appropriate way for what we were facing in 2019 and 2020. It was like, 'How do we rectify this?'

"Structurally, the song hits my other sweet spot. It's not first-position B; it's first-position G, whether it's open nut or wherever the capo lands. As I get older, that chord has sort of become my recliner and a good book. First-position G — it all starts and ends there. I'll just pick up a guitar and start playing, like I did in my first days, and I'll land on that chord. It's amazing how many songs you can write with it."

NOEL VASQUEZ/GETTY IMAGES (2011); DANIEL BOCZARSKI/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (2019); MICHAEL BUCKNER/GETTY IMAGES (2209)

OFF-ROAD ADVENTURE

Sidelined by the pandemic, Steve Stevens and Billy Idol made an EP that recalls old times.

BY JOE BOSSO

STEVE STEVENS ADMITS that he and Billy Idol could have run wild during the 2020 Covid lockdown. "There were no gigs, and we had something we haven't had in a long, long time – unlimited time off," he says. "We could have easily made a full album, or even a double album if we wanted."

Instead, the two longtime musical partners stuck to their original plan to record a tight four-song EP, an all-killer, no-filler affair titled *The Roadside*. Stevens credits his wife, Josie, with inspiring the decision to go with a shorter musical statement. "Josie listens to a lot of contemporary music, and she explained to me that more artists are releasing singles these days," he ways. "After they have enough singles, they put them out on an EP. I thought it was a good way to go. Billy and I have made albums that took six, seven and eight months to get done. But let's face it: Longer doesn't always mean better."

For *The Roadside*, Stevens and Idol teamed with musician and producer Butch Walker, best known for his work with pop monster sellers like Avril Lavigne, Pink, Katy Perry and Fall Out Boy, among others. "I heard a track that Butch did with Fall Out Boy called 'Light 'Em Up,' and I thought it was fantastic," Stevens says. "I mentioned it to Billy, and lo and behold, there we were."

Onstage with Idol at SunFest 2018

JIM RASSOL/SUN SENTINEL/TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE VIA GETTY IMAGES

"ADDING THE RAY GUN WAS FLASHY. THAT'S JUST ME BEING ME"

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

Stevens and Idol holed up with Walker in the producer's Santa Monica studio, where they became "a three-man band." "Whatever needed to be played, we did it right there," Stevens says. "It was a very fun and relaxed atmosphere, and it turned out to be such a saving grace to be able to carry on and be creative. Billy and I were pretty bummed that we couldn't tour, so making this record really lifted our spirits."

Rather than try to apply some sort of *au courant* window dressing to the record, Walker seized on stylistic aspects of the classic Idol-Stevens sound and sought to magnify them. Rousing female backing vocals rise from the mix, calling to mind earlier hits like "To Be a Lover" and Idol's remake of "Mony Mony." "It's funny – we used to have female voices on all the old records," Stevens says. "Billy and I kind of forgot about that."

As for Stevens' guitar tracks, Walker went similarly retro. On the plaintive ballad "Baby Put Your Clothes Back On," the guitarist plays sprawling, reverb-drenched spaghetti western riffs reminiscent of "White Wedding," and his spirited Chuck Berry–esque solo in the toe-tapping rave-up "Rita Hayworth" could have been lifted straight from "Rebel Yell." For good measure, Stevens even caps the lead off with another "Rebel Yell" call-out — a toy ray gun blast. "It was fun to keep that solo old-school rock 'n' roll," he says. "It wasn't about playing millions of notes or trying to be flash." He laughs. "Okay, adding the ray gun was flashy. That's just me being me."

While Stevens stuck to a pair of his signature Knaggs guitars, he found some of Walker's instruments too tempting to resist, including a refinished Harmony Sovereign acoustic. "It's the same kind Jimmy Page favored, and he used it on 'Stairway to Heaven,'" he notes. "Anytime something called for an acoustic, that's the one I went for. Nothing could beat its sound."

18+

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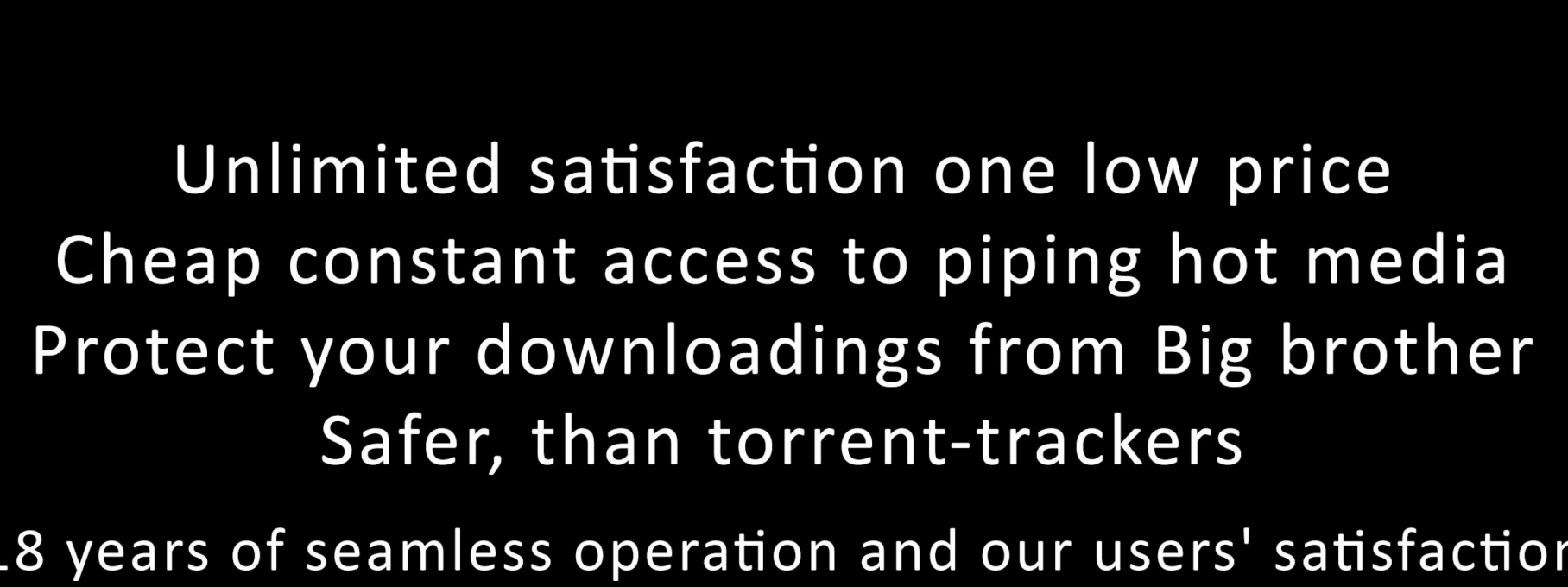

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Repeat Performance

The Watkins Copicat was the original — and some still contend, best — tape echo.

HIS NAME MIGHT not be as redolent of the glory days of English guitar gear as those of fellow pioneers Dick Denney, Tom Jennings, Jim Marshall and Dave Reeves, but Charlie Watkins was a major innovator of the golden age of British amps and effects. For that matter, he was supplying the scene both earlier and longer than any of those iconic designers and manufacturers.

Like JMI/Vox founder Jennings, Watkins was an accordionist and had just returned from his war service in the late 1940s, looking to get back into the London music scene. For a time, he scratched out a living playing in small local outfits, but like so many musicians, he saw the need for a proper day job. With his brother Reg, Watkins opened a record shop in Tooting Market in 1949 before moving, in 1951, to larger premises nearby in his native Balham. There, they began to sell accordions and other musical instruments and soon became a hangout for local musicians. Several years before JMI even began thinking much in terms of the electric guitar, Watkins saw the instrument's potential popularity but despaired of his fellow musicians' inability to be heard amid the noise of horns and accordions. As he told *Sound On Sound* magazine in an interview published in 2015, after his death, "I thought, 'I've put up with that long enough. I can do something about that. I'll make an amplifier!' "

Watkins soon had a line of jobbed-out AC/DC amplifiers to offer, but he dropped it after a year or two due to the potentially dangerous dual-voltage power supplies. Taking the effort in-house to manufacture standard AC-powered units, Watkins achieved recognition with the iconic, V-fronted Dominator of the late '50s and early '60s.

But another product he released at around the same time actually became his biggest seller. In 1958, slapback echo had been popular with American rock and rollers for a couple of years and was making inroads as the new sound in Britain and Europe. That's when a pair of customers, returning from a visit to Italy, dropped into the shop to regale Watkins with talk of a performance they'd seen there. The singer Marino Marini, who was enjoying a worldwide hit with his cover of Dominico Modugno's hit "Volare," had run his microphone through a pair of reel-to-reel recorders with one continuous tape loop rolling between them to recreate his distinctive vocal echo. The sound had knocked their socks off.

Inspiration hit like "a bell that rang in my head," Watkins told author David Petersen for *The Guitar Magazine* in 2000. Determining that the system produced echo from the continuous tape loop, he compacted the engineering — with the help of engineer Bill Purkis — into a 12-by-eight-inch box, using a Gerrard gramophone motor for transport and adding a selector switch to tap three different replay heads. Before he knew it, Watkins had devised a feedback loop that allowed a variable echo-repeat effect. The result was the first independent tape-loop-based echo unit in the world, and it signaled an impending sonic revolution.

"I had a sample unit in the shop, to see what the demand might be like," Watkins said, "and meantime we got busy and built 100 units. I called them Copicats. The day I planned to put them on sale was a Saturday... I went to open up, and the door burst open

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

> Originally powered by two ECC83 (a.k.a. 12AX7) and one 6BR8 tubes
> Continual tape loop
> One record head and three playback heads (four playback in later units)
> Pushbutton echo-time selectors
> Controls for gain, depth and repeats

BY DAVE HUNTER

A vintage tube Watkins Copicat (here and opposite). The device evolved into the solid-state version (shown this page).

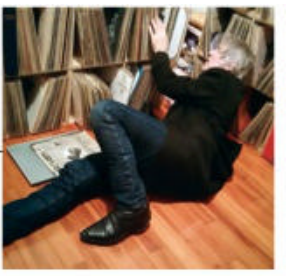
with the press of customers. I remember selling the very first one to Johnny Kidd." Kidd was the singer for Johnny Kidd & the Pirates, who in 1960 would have a number one hit with "Shakin' All Over," replete with Copicat echo. "Those first 100 units sold that same day," Watkins continued. "I sold so many of them that they paid for my first factory in Offley Road [*in London*], which I bought in 1961."

To put a more precise number on the Copicat's success, Watkins told me in the early 2000s that he sold "about a thousand Copicats a month" in the first few years of the '60s. The unit provided many British guitarists with a road to the popular slap-back and short-echo sounds they'd been hearing from American stars like Scotty Moore and Chet Atkins, and soon it was a major part of the British sound, gracing hits by Hank Marvin and the Shadows and many others.

"I PUT THEM ON SALE ON A SATURDAY, AND THE DOOR BURST OPEN WITH THE PRESS OF CUSTOMERS"

—CHARLIE WATKINS

The Copicat remained a good seller for Watkins throughout the '60s, adopting the WEM logo (for Watkins Electric Music) when the namesake changed to that brand in late 1963 or '64 out of admiration for the popular Vox products of the time. Versions were made for Guild and Hagstrom (the latter under the Kent brand name), and the Copicat evolved into solid-state units later in the decade and into the '70s, as well as branching out into other more complex variations on the original theme. Versions of the Watkins/WEM Copicat remained in production well into the 2000s, though the current state of its availability or otherwise is unclear at the time of writing. Charlie Watkins passed away at his home in Balham in 2014 at the age of 91.



BY JIM CAMPILONGO

Junior Brown's Bar-Band Virtuosity

Guit With It reveals the show-stopping excitement of his guit-steel performance.

JUNIOR BROWN IS what I would call a bar-band virtuoso. What is that, you might ask? Fair question. To me, it's an artist who thrives in a 200-capacity (or less) venue, one who, along with putting on a great show, never comes close to taking more than what he gives. Junior Brown is among the elite of this genre. Playing his guit-steel double-neck, a hybrid electric and lap-steel guitar, he delivers show-stopping solos and will quote Hendrix at the drop of a hat. His detuning plunges are exciting and feel like a bomb hit the building. And then there is his songwriting. In my opinion Junior Brown is a totally underrated tunesmith. His songs are filled with melody and original hooks, and they breathe characters and scenarios that become real people, living in honest-to-goodness situations. Junior's prose gives life.

For evidence, I point you to his album *Guit With It*. Released on Curb Records in 1993, it's a great overview of Junior's unique depth and encyclopedic knowledge of country music and beyond.

Guit With It begins with the fast Ray Price shuffle "Doin' What Comes Easy to a Fool," which has great playing throughout. Special mention goes to Junior's dismount on his guitar solo, a wild counterpoint phrase that is hall of fame major league. Next up is "Highway Patrol," where Mr. Brown channels Red Simpson like nobody I've heard. He remains himself while nailing the genre. On the instrumental track "Sugarfoot Rag," Junior throws in the kitchen sink for an action-packed four minutes of instrumental bliss.

My favorite song here is the little masterpiece "My Wife Thinks You're Dead." The spoken lyric is danceable all by itself; I feel like I'm listening to an audiobook. Jimmie Vaughan plays a curiously out-of-tune solo, but maybe I'm nitpicking and that was the point. I shrug my shoulders. Junior steps up next to deliver a guit-steel solo that's one for the ages. The tune "Names And Addresses" reminds me of a great Willie Nelson tune that incorporates some moderate jazz changes. Junior sings and plays these changes as if they fit him like a comfortable pair of old slippers. "Guit-Steel Blues" is another instrumental tour de force, one on which his guit-steel quotes Hendrix's "Red House" and takes us on a ride on the edge of our seats. This is a blues that makes you feel good, and *Guit With It* is a great hang.

JUNIOR WOULD PLUCK SIX NOTES AND OBLITERATE EVERYTHING I HAD PLAYED BEFORE HIM DOWN TO A WELL-INTENTIONED, FORGETTABLE INTRODUCTION

Back in the 1990s, I was lucky enough to open for Junior Brown twice. It was a humbling experience. Performing at the time with his wife on rhythm guitar, a swinging bassist and a drummer playing a lone snare drum, Junior and his band filled the house with sound wherever they went. When our set was over, he plucked six notes and obliterated everything I had played before him down to a well-intentioned, forgettable introduction. I was a young musician and knew I had a lot of work to do.

Like Chet Atkins, Roy Buchanan, Link Wray and Lonnie Mack, Junior Brown is cut from bar-band virtuoso cloth. With him, and all the aforementioned players, the presentation is close-up and personal, with one eye on the audience. In contrast, arena performances demand participation. We all stand in the vastness and show our gratitude that we were lucky enough to hear Keith Richards play the intro to "Satisfaction" one more time. Sorry folks, I need more than that. I don't go to a show to unconditionally praise artists. I long to be entertained and moved by the soul and urgency of the music. Bar-band virtuosos like Junior Brown create a relationship based on the here and now, and *Guit With It* captures his mastery in full.

Jim Campilongo has 14 critically acclaimed instrumental records available on vinyl, CD and digital download at jimcampilongo.com.

BY TERRY CARLETON

Back to the Future

Reunited with its owner after 50 years, this custom Whatchamacallit double-neck is a blast from 1954.

SIXTY-FIVE YEARS ago, 16-year-old Jimmy Luttrell played this guitar with his band on *The Ted Mack Amateur Hour,* a TV talent-show precursor to *America's Got Talent*. Jimmy, who hailed from San Pablo, California, was a prodigy who played guitar, mandolin and violin. He lived with his family in a trailer park, where his practicing was frequently overheard, to the delight of most of his neighbors, in particular one Mr. Wesley Elmore. A fine musician himself and a luthier, Elmore built this double-neck masterpiece, dubbed the Whatchamacallit, and presented it to Jimmy as a gift.

Sadly, the guitar was stolen from the band's VW bus after the Ted Mack appearance. Fifty years later, the guitar's new owner, unaware of its history, tracked Jimmy down after seeing the faded outline of his name on the handmade case, hoping he could answer questions about the guitar's background. Jimmy told the guy he'd get back to him, contacted the authorities in the new owner's city and soon after was reunited with the guitar. And it's still in perfect condition!

Jimmy Luttrell with the Whatchamacallit in the '50s.

WEIRDO FACTOR

Featuring a six-string guitar and four-string mandolin — no doubled strings! — the guitar features wonderful inlays on a poker-card theme, scrolls and artisanal woodwork. The fingerboards have dice inlays, and the pickups, pickguards and tailpiece are adorned with tortoise shell and cream-colored plastic strips. The body and necks are made from 16 pieces of one-inch-wide alternating strips of maple and mahogany, and the bridges are carved from solid ebony.

PLAYABILITY AND SOUND

I was pleasantly surprised at how well this beauty plays. The guitar has a 25 1/2–inch scale, like a Strat, but the 19-fret neck plays more like a Gibson. The action is low, and the frets are smooth and polished. It plays like it had just been set up, but Jimmy assures me this is how it always was. Good thing too, because there are no truss rods in this build. The guitar's pickups are the fabled 1954 P-90s, and they're full-bodied, but with a nice high-end presence. The neck position is the jazzier of the two, but the middle position is cool in an almost out-of-phase kind of way. The P-90s not only sound awesome clean but rock with overdrive and/or distortion.

The mandolin's DeArmond pickup sounds chimey and present, and I hardly missed the absent double strings. The guitar and mandolin have separate tone and volume controls, and a push-button on the mando lets you engage its pickup without disengaging the guitar.

VALUE

As far as we know, Elmore made between three and five of these, two of which he and his wife played in their duo. It's anybody's guess what this might be worth. To Jimmy, it's priceless.

WHY IT RULES

This one rules because it still plays, looks, and sounds terrific. It rules on another level, which is happiness. Regaining ownership of it after 50 years thinking it was gone forever, made Jimmy even happier than the day it was presented to him.

Thanks to Jimmy and Georgine Luttrell for letting me borrow this heirloom and tell its story. I've had the pleasure of recording/producing some 15 albums with Jimmy. Please look him up online.

Got a whack job? Feel free to get in touch with me at rtcarleton@gmail.com. Who knows? Maybe I'll write about it.

GUITAR PHOTO BY MAY YAM. PHOTO OF JIMMY LUTTRELL COURTESY OF JIMMY LUTTRELL

CATCH ME *if you can*

Chuck Berry brought poetry to pop and broke race barriers to become rock and roll's first guitar-playing frontman. As he recalled, it all began with some "hillbilly stuff" he revved into a rocker: "Maybellene."

BY DENNY ILETT AND CHRISTOPHER SCAPELLITI

"If you had to give rock and roll another name, you might call it Chuck Berry," John Lennon once famously quipped. It was an apt point of reference for Lennon, a musician first drawn to rock and roll in 1955 by the vocal histrionics of Elvis Presley. Despite Presley's early influence on the emerging genre, by the late 1950s he had been eclipsed — at least in the eyes of guitar-wielding rockers — by Chuck Berry. Where Presley had fused White country leanings with Black blues to create a vocal representation of this new music called rock and roll, Chuck was a Black guitarist with a liking for country and the wit to see its potential for him as a performer. He also had a poetic way with words, unsurpassed clarity of diction and the ability to set '50s teen scenarios to music. And it was all there with his first record, the 1955 hit "Maybellene," which launched not only his career but that of every rock and roll guitarist who followed.

Born into a large middle-class family in St. Louis, Missouri, on October 18, 1926, Charles Edward Anderson Berry was the

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

fourth of six children. His father, Henry, was deacon of the Baptist church in the area of St. Louis called the Ville, where the family lived. His mother, Martha, was a school headmistress, which meant that Chuck and his siblings enjoyed a relatively prosperous upbringing contrary to that of many families — both Black and White — in the 1920s and 1930s.

From an early age, Chuck showed an interest in music and poetry. Encouraged by his parents, he progressed quickly as a musician, making his first public appearance in 1941 at the age of 15, while still at high school. The song he chose, Jay McShann's "Confessin' the Blues," was a big-band hit at the time and boasted in its ranks another fledgling genius in the form of alto saxophonist Charlie Parker, one of the inventors of bebop jazz.

"CURIOSITY PROVOKED ME TO LAY A LOT OF COUNTRY STUFF ON OUR BLACK AUDIENCE"
— Chuck Berry

Despite his upbringing and talents, Chuck had a rough time finding his footing. Brushes with the law led to a three-year stint in prison for armed robbery. Shortly after his release, on his 21st birthday, in 1947, he met and married Themetta Suggs and was soon raising a family. To support his household, Chuck worked a variety of jobs, including — significantly — two stints at car assembly plants in St. Louis. Considering the abundance of motor-related metaphors in his later songs, it's intriguing to picture a young man, bursting with ideas, working in a mundane job but composing riffs, rhythms and lyrics in his head to the beat of the factory machinery.

With Eric Clapton and Keith Richards at Chuck's Los Angeles home during the filming of *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*, in 1986

By the early '50s, Chuck was moonlighting with local bands at clubs in and around St. Louis, which is how he came to the attention of pianist Johnnie Johnson, whose trio held a residency at the Cosmopolitan Club. When the trio's saxophonist, Alvin Bennett, suffered a stroke just before the group's 1952 New Year's Eve gig, Johnson called Chuck to fill in. The pianist figured the fledgling guitarist wouldn't have a gig (he didn't) and knew his vocal talents could save the show. The date went so well that Chuck stayed in the band after Bennett returned.

Although the group played mostly blues and ballads, Chuck had begun to take an interest in presenting some country-flavored tunes to the club. "Curiosity provoked me to lay a lot of country stuff on our black audience," he wrote years later. "After they laughed at me a few times, they began requesting the hillbilly stuff and enjoyed dancing to it."

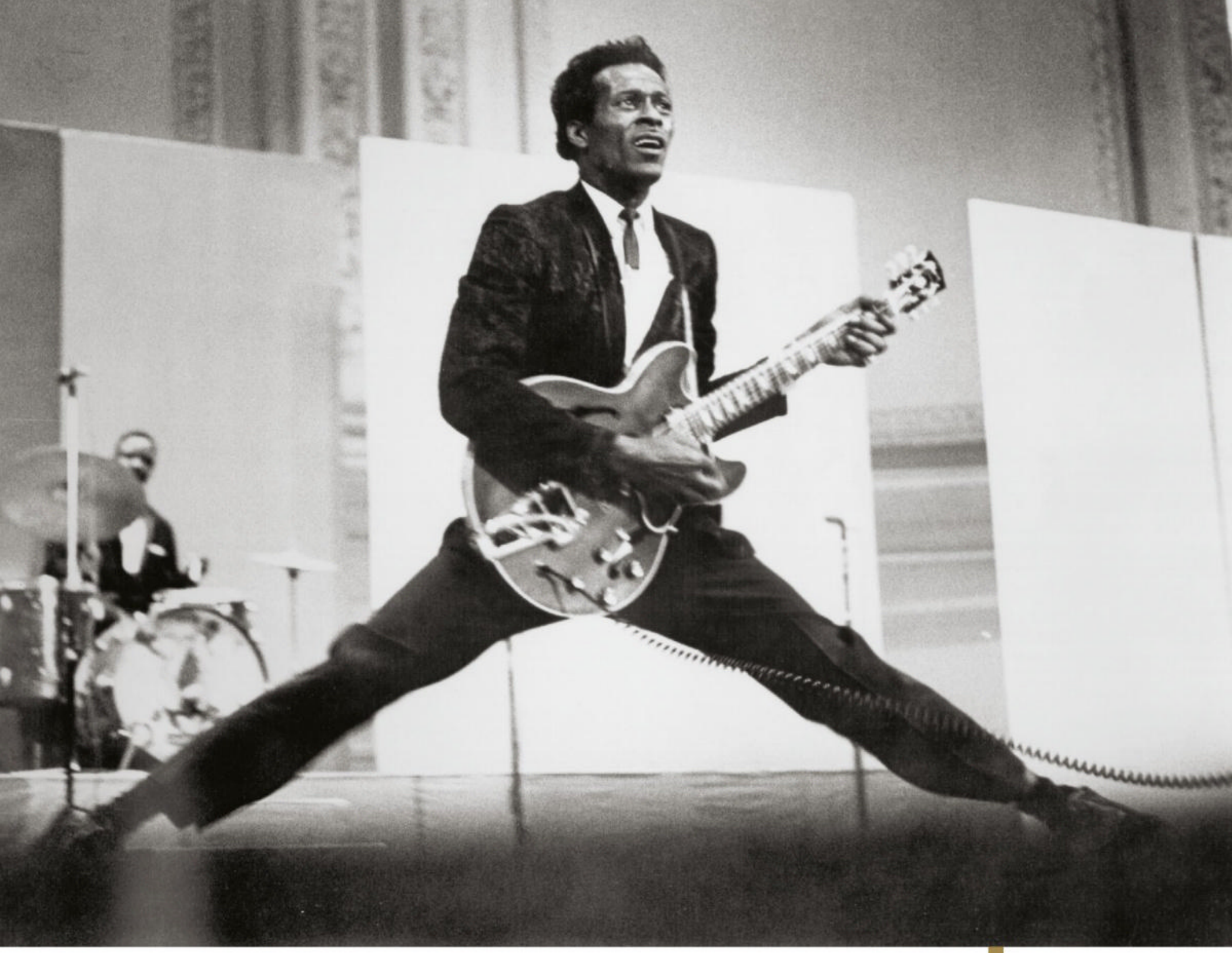
While Chuck was considering that a fusion of blues and country might make for a new sound, another major influence came along in the form of R&B maestro T-Bone Walker. T-Bone, with his jazz-playing contemporary Charlie Christian, was instrumental in elevating the guitar from its former position as a rhythm tool to that of a front-line solo voice. Walker was also a consummate showman, playing the guitar behind his back while doing the splits and delivering solos that, at times, would make an audience think his guitar was speaking to them. Chuck Berry was so taken with Walker that he lifted many of the guitarist's trademark licks, double-stops and unison bends, incorporating them into his own emerging style.

By now, it was clear to Johnson that Chuck was the star of the show, and he ceded power to his young guitarist. Besides, said Johnson, "I figured we could get better jobs with Chuck running the band. He had a car, and rubber wheels beat rubber heels any day." The guitarist began mixing blues, country, Nat "King" Cole ballads and T-Bone showmanship, which helped the group become the most popular band on the St. Louis club scene.

As Chuck's popularity grew, so did his ambitions. By the mid 1950s, he'd begun writing songs and felt he was ready to record them. In May 1955, he steered his car up to Chicago, where he planned to see his idol, Muddy Waters, perform a Friday night show.

"And I listened to him for his entire set," Chuck recalled to NPR in 2000. "When he was over, I went up to him, I asked him for his autograph and told him that I played guitar." But Chuck had something more on his mind. "How do you get in touch with a record company?" he asked. Muddy suggested he try his boss, Leonard Chess, over at Chess Records.

TERRY O'NEILL/ICONIC IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES



Performing circa 1968. Chuck's "splits," like his duckwalk, brought a high degree of physicality and fun to his performances.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

That Monday morning, Chuck intercepted Chess as he walked into the studio and made his pitch. Chess told him to return in a week with a demo. Chuck came back with his band and four new songs, including "Wee Wee Hours" and "Ida May." The latter was a rocked-up number inspired in part by the traditional "hillbilly" tune "Ida Red," made popular by Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys in 1938.

"And we set the band up, and we played all four of them," Chuck said. He was sure "Wee Wee Hours" would be the song to clinch the deal, but Chess was taken by "Ida May" — except he didn't like the title, which he considered too country sounding.

"And that was a problem, so nobody could think of a name," pianist Johnson recalled. "We looked up on the windowsill, and there was a mascara box up there with 'Maybellene' written on it. And Leonard Chess said, 'Why don't we name the damn thing "Maybellene"?'" That suited Chuck, who changed the lyrics and took the songwriting credit. The May 21, 1955, session features, in addition to Johnson, the trio's drummer, Ebby Hardy, and blues giant Willie Dixon on bass. It took 36 takes to get the song recorded to everyone's satisfaction. But considering it was Chuck's first time in a recording studio, the session was an unqualified success.

Afterward, the guitarist went back to St. Louis and waited to hear what would happen with his song. Weeks went by with no word from Chess. Then, by chance on an August day, Chuck heard the record on the radio while passing by the tailor's shop where he'd bought his high school graduation coat. "I passed by the shop until the song played out, you know? I didn't want anybody to see me listening," he told NPR. "But it was 'Maybellene' I was listening to." When the song finished, Chuck ran the 20-some blocks home to tell everyone. "Knocked me out to hear myself, you know."

Soon "Maybellene" was having the same effect on radio listeners. From the first bar, it was clear that this was something new. Chuck's guitar is raw, energetic and infectious, relentlessly rhythmic and driving behind the vocal, then piercing through with heaps of his classic attitude in the solo. The track featured Chuck's modernized, up-tempo version of the T-Bone style with even more double-stops and string bends. What's more, the song's guitar sound was markedly different to the clean, chiming tones

that came from Walker's Gibson ES-250. Chuck's guitar, a Gibson ES-350T, drove his amp into distortion, adding a real sense of anarchy to the music. With its combination of blues and country stylings, "Maybellene" became a huge hit with record buyers of all races, hitting numbers one and five on the R&B and *Billboard* Best Sellers charts, respectively.

Chuck's song and sound, coupled with a dynamic stage act featuring acrobatics like splits and duck walking, propelled him to overnight super-stardom. The hits came thick and fast: "Roll Over Beethoven," "Too Much Monkey Business," "Rock and Roll Music," "Sweet Little Sixteen," "Memphis Tennessee" and the iconic "Johnny B. Goode" — the entirety recorded between 1956 and 1959. In all, Chuck scored more than a dozen hit singles during this period. He went from earning $15 a night to more than $1,500 — a fortune in the 1950s. He invested heavily in St. Louis real estate and even opened up a racially mixed nightclub — pioneering for its time — in 1958.

"NOBODY COULD THINK OF A NAME. AND LEONARD CHESS SAID, 'WHY DON'T WE NAME THE DAMN THING 'MAYBELLENE'?"
— Johnnie Johnson

By December 1959, and seemingly with the music and business worlds at his feet, Chuck Berry again found himself on the wrong side of the law when he was arrested following allegations that he had sex with 14-year-old waitress, Janice Escalante, whom he had transported over state lines to work at his club as a hat-check girl. Chuck's appeal at the 1960 trial was upheld and a new trial set for May 1961. He was eventually convicted and served 18 months of a three-year sentence, being released in October 1963.

Over the four-year period between his initial arrest and release from prison, Chuck's popularity had waned and his output slowed, despite Chess continuing to release material already in the can. By 1963, however, the music scene on both sides of the Atlantic had changed drastically, which proved to be just what Chuck needed to get back on top.

Rock and roll, blues and R&B records had been making their way across the Atlantic for several years and were causing a huge stir among British youth. This movement was instrumental in bringing the music of Chuck Berry and his contemporaries to a new audience, with bands such as the Beatles and the Stones recording versions of Chuck's songs on early albums.

Chuck was able to secure a new record contract with Mercury Records and released several singles and albums between 1963 and '69, including "No Particular Place to Go," yet another automobile-related song. Despite not achieving his previous success on record, Chuck became a fixture on the touring circuit, but his stint in prison had turned him into a moody and bitter man. This, coupled with his reluctance to rehearse with the pick-up bands he played with, earned him a reputation as a difficult person to work for. He insisted on being paid in full, and in cash, before he would walk onstage — which eventually got him into trouble with the taxman — and his performances became ever more erratic.

By the end of the 1960s, disillusioned with Mercury, Chuck returned to Chess, scoring an unlikely hit with an innuendo-laden ditty called "My Ding-A-Ling" in '71, a song that earned him his first official Gold record. Through the decade, Chuck once again became a headline attraction at clubs, concert halls and festivals, but in 1979, the IRS finally caught up with him and, pleading guilty to tax evasion charges, Chuck was sentenced to a combination of a short prison stint and community service. Following the release of his 19th studio album, *Rockit*, in 1979, he would not release another record in his lifetime.

Chuck continued performing heavily, traveling solo and hiring pickup bands to support him at his gigs. As he turned 60 in 1986, his longtime fan and acolyte Keith Richards organized a celebration concert for Chuck, featuring guests like Eric Clapton, Robert Cray, Linda Ronstadt, Julian Lennon and Chuck's former Chess Records stablemate Etta James. Director Taylor Hackford filmed the rehearsal and show, which were released as the documentary *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*, in 1987. Given the combination of Chuck and Richards, it's perhaps not surprising that the film's highlights aren't so much the star-studded performances but an argument between both men about amp settings and Chuck's chiding the Rolling Stones guitarist for fluffing the intro to his hit song "Carol."

Performing at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, May 1981

CHUCK FISHMAN/GETTY IMAGES

POACHED FRUIT

Five times famous musicians stole from *Chuck Berry.*

COUNTLESS GUITARISTS HAVE lifted Chuck Berry's licks and riffs, which seems only fair, considering that Berry stole some of them himself. But when did it cross the line? Apparently whenever Chuck said so. Here are five thefts from the Berry patch.

SURFIN' U.S.A.
The Beach Boys (1963)

This Beach Boys hit is essentially Chuck's "Sweet Little Sixteen" with new lyrics penned by Beach Boys leader Brian Wilson and singer Mike Love, who was uncredited. Wilson liked how Berry's lyrics named key places in the U.S. and thought a song that gave a shout out to California's top surf spots could be a hit. "I just took 'Sweet Little Sixteen' and rewrote it into something of our own," Wilson told *The Los Angeles Times* in 2015. While the Leonard Chess biopic *Cadillac Records* depicts Berry (played by Mos Def) as being angry about Wilson's appropriation of his music, in reality the guitarist liked "Surfin' U.S.A." and reportedly even complimented the Beach Boys. "We ran into Chuck Berry in Copenhagen and he told us he loves 'Surfin' U.S.A.'," guitarist Carl Wilson recalled. But that didn't stop him from demanding his cut. Beach Boys manager Murray Wilson (the father of Brian and his brothers) gave the song to Berry's publisher, Arc Music, and for a while the song was credited solely to Berry, although in later years it has been shared by Berry and Wilson.

FUN, FUN, FUN
The Beach Boys (1964)

These guys again! You'd be forgiven for hearing Carl Wilson's opening guitar solo to this early Beach Boys hit and thinking it was a cover of "Johnny B. Goode" — it's nearly identical to Berry's timeless intro to his 1958 classic track.

DON PAULSEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

But Berry didn't sue, and he likely couldn't have, considering that he had himself copped the lines from Carl Hogan's intro to the Louis Jordan's 1946 tune "Ain't That Just Like a Woman (They'll Do It Every Time)." Citing his influences, Berry said, "The main guy was Louis Jordan. I wanted to sing like Nat Cole, with lyrics like Louis Jordan, with the swing of Bennie Goodman with Charlie Christian on guitar, playing Carl Hogan's riffs, with the soul of Muddy Waters."

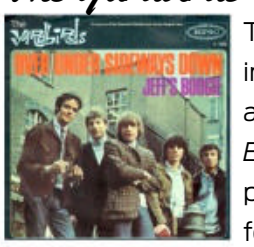
I SAW HER STANDING THERE
The Beatles (1963)

"From the first minute we heard the great guitar intro to 'Sweet Little Sixteen,' we became fans of the great Chuck Berry," Paul McCartney wrote upon Berry's passing. "We learnt so many things from him which led us into a dream world of rock 'n' roll music." Like his Beatle bandmate John Lennon, who was famously known to pinch Berry (see below), the bassist appropriated the bass line to this early Beatles cut from Berry's catalog, specifically the track "I'm Talking About You," which the Beatles performed on the BBC in 1963. "I played exactly the same notes as he did and it fitted our number perfectly," McCartney revealed in his autobiography, *Many Years From Now*. "Even now, when I tell people, I find few of them believe me; therefore, I maintain that a bass riff hasn't got to be original."

COME TOGETHER
The Beatles (1969)

John Lennon's opening composition from *Abbey Road* begins by lifting a pair of lines from the second verse of Berry's 1956 cut "You Can't Catch Me," with a minor alteration: Lennon sings "Here come ol' flattop, he come groovin' up slowly," while Berry's original was, "Here come a flattop, he was movin' up with me." Originally played at a faster tempo than it appears on *Abbey Road*, "Come Together" was too close to Berry's tune for McCartney, who suggsted the Beatles give the song a different groove to help disguise the obvious similarities in the lyrics and melody. "I said, 'Let's slow it down with a swampy bass-and-drums vibe.' I came up with a bass line and it all flowed from there." That didn't stop Berry's publisher Big Seven Music from filing a claim of copyright infringement. The case was settled out of court after Lennon agreed to record three songs from Big Seven's catalog.

JEFF'S BOOGIE
The Yardbirds (1966)



This hyperspeed instrumental showcase is a highlight of *Roger the Engineer*, the Yardbirds' psychedelic rock effort featuring Jeff Beck, who takes his cues here from Berry's 1958 romp "Guitar Boogie." Berry's version may be his own take on Arthur Smith's 1948 12-bar Western swing track that bears the same name, which makes sense when you consider that Berry's music was a fusion of R&B and country. Beck's version became a staple of his live shows, and he performed it with Stevie Ray Vaughan in 1984 (see the *Live in Honolulu* DVD) and during their 1989 tour.

Onstage at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, May 1981

Richards, though, still holds his hero in the highest regard: "To me, Chuck Berry always was the epitome of rhythm and blues playing," he enthuses. "It was beautiful, effortless, and his timing was perfection."

Chuck continued to perform as the years went on. From 1996 to 2014, he gave a monthly show at Blueberry Hill restaurant and bar in St. Louis, playing with a band that included his children Charles Berry Jr. and Ingrid, on guitar and harmonica, respectively. Those shows provide the basis for the new album *Live From Blueberry Hill* (Dualtone Records), which features the Blueberry Hill Band, consisting of his kids, bassist and band leader Jimmy Marsala, pianist Robert Lohr, and drummer Keith Robinson. The guitarist had plans to release another album, titled *Chuck*, in 2017, but on March 18 of that year, he died at home of cardiac arrest. He was 90.

Chuck Berry's dark side is well known, but his achievements as a musical pioneer and innovator are undeniable. "Chuck Berry was the first artist that really did it all, like wrote the songs, he wrote the lyrics of the music, he choreographed the stage show," said Blueberry Hill owner Joe Edwards. Edwards has called Chuck rock's first poet, and rightly so. Beyond his deft talent for storytelling, Chuck had a gift for wordplay, creating terms like *motor-vating*, in "Maybellene," and *botheration*, in "Too Much Money Business." "What he did with the English language and how he worked the words and the detail that he put into the songs, I mean, if you listen to the verses in a Chuck Berry song, they keep changing, and they keep telling the story," Edwards said. "And then pretty soon, by the end of that song — and it might only be a two-minute, 58-second song — you've heard a lifetime in the life of a teenager."

Chuck would also fashion set-piece guitar intros to his songs, giving instant recognition to his records and defining the "Chuck Berry" sound, one that immediately found favor with other players. "There's one great thing that stands out on guitar for me, and that's Chuck Berry's 'Johnny B. Goode,'" AC/DC's Angus Young says. "You hear that and you immediately know what it is. For me, that's the thing; that's what it's all about. If you can come up with something like that, great. As long as it's different but it's still you. That's the challenge."

What remains undeniable is that Chuck Berry was a pioneer and innovator, crossing racial lines with his fusion of country and blues, and becoming the first Black rock and roll artist to achieve national success — not to mention, international acclaim and influence — with his own songs. And to that, let's add another first: rock-and-roll guitar hero. As John Lennon said, "I don't think there's a group in the world that wasn't turned on by Chuck Berry."

CHUCK FISHMAN/GETTY IMAGES

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LEETOVER Berrys

You know the hits. Now check out these 10 lesser-known and overlooked picks from Chuck's deep catalog.

BY CHRISTOPHER SCAPELLITI

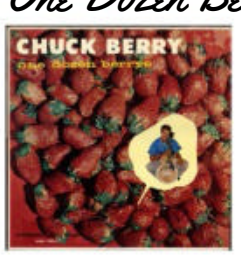
Chuck performs with the Blues Project at the Anderson Theater in New York City, circa 1968. A young Al Kooper sits at the Hohner Pianet.

DON PAULSEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

DEEP FEELING
After School Session (1957)

Chuck plays a pedal steel on this slow, bluesy instrumental, and the results are impressive enough to make you wonder what might have happened if he'd kept at it. Here, as in all his standard guitar playing, he demonstrates his supreme gift for melody and expression, using a Fender 400 Hawaiian/Country Western pedal steel guitar that, reportedly, he bought sometime in the 1950s. Diehard fans will recall the lengthy tracking shot of Chuck playing a Fender 400 solo at home that closes Taylor Hackford's excellent 1987 biopic, *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*.

ROCKIN' AT THE PHILHARMONIC
One Dozen Berrys (1957)

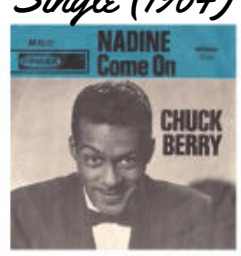


The influence of both Louis Jordan and Bob Willis are evident on this instrumental, as Chuck plays jazzy licks with a swinging rhythm section, complete with the era's requisite slapback echo. Chuck takes his time warming up, favoring single-note lines and throwing in hammer-ons and rakes before digging in with double-stops on the second verse. The song's title is likely a play on the *Jazz at the Philharmonic* series of recordings and tours that were popular between 1945 and 1957.

LET IT ROCK
Rockin' at the Hops (1960)

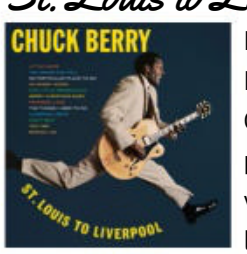
Chuck's talent for creating concise vignettes is all over this driving tune as he tells the story of an unscheduled train bearing down on a work crew gambling on the tracks. His deft double-stops mimic the sound of the approaching engine, a bit of playfulness that reminds you how much emotion and storytelling Chuck conveyed in his guitar playing alone. Just 1:42 minutes in length, the song blows by so fast you might miss it, but many artists, from the Rolling Stones to a young Bob Seger on his stellar *Smokin' OP's* album, caught this train and created their own memorable journey.

NADINE (IS IT YOU?)
Single (1964)



The first track Chuck issued after his 1963 release from prison, "Nadine (Is It You?)" is an update of "Maybellene," as he spies his "future bride" all over town but is always just one step behind her. The usual Berry conveyances — namely Cadillacs, but also city buses and Yellow cabs — are here in abundance, along with regional references (Chuck calls out to Nadine by "campaign shouting like a southern diplomat") that help the track slot neatly into his established stylistic format. The piano and saxes carry the lead on this shimmying boogie, but the guitarist leads the charge with his tasty sliding double-stop intro riff.

YOU TWO
St. Louis to Liverpool (1964)



Having influenced the British Invasion bands, Chuck emerged from prison just as those acts were transforming the pop landscape. In response, he put out a pair of albums — *St. Louis to Liverpool* and *Chuck Berry in London* — that attempted to reclaim his place in the mainstream with a mix of rockers and softer pop tunes, like the sophisticated "You Two." "Listening to my idol Nat Cole prompted me to sing sentimental songs with distinct diction," Chuck wrote in his autobiography, and "You Two" exemplifies this perfectly. It's a

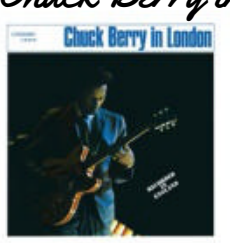
GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

smooth, swinging hipster tune about a "cozy clan of four" on a double date in the country air. Chuck's guitar solo here could fit as well into any of his standard rock and rollers, demonstrating the seemingly effortless malleability of his style.

LIVERPOOL DRIVE
St. Louis to Liverpool (1964)

Released as the B side to the hit "No Particular Place to Go," "Liverpool Drive" is little more than a fun jaunt up and down the fretboard, and it's refreshing to hear Chuck and his band play with such enthusiasm and abandon. The mood is more St. Louis than Liverpool, but Chuck concludes the tune with a Beatles-esque 7-9 chord.

I WANT TO BE YOUR DRIVER
Chuck Berry in London (1965)



As on *St. Louis to Liverpool*, Chuck attempted to evolve beyond his tried-and-true formula on *Chuck Berry in London*, delivering stronger blues numbers and even funk. "I Want to Be Your Driver" oozes with double entendres and possibly served as an influence for the Beatles' "Drive My Car." Chuck sings higher and more insistently than usual, using his solo break to lower the temperature with some seductively slinky double-stop licks played an octave below the song's melody to vary the mood. From his cutting guitar tone to the cavernous reverb and Merseybeat drumming, he convincingly created a space for himself in a pop landscape that owed so much back to him.

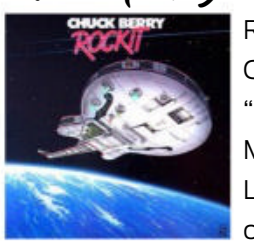
BUTTERSCOTCH
Chuck Berry in London (1965)

Not the Freddie King cut. Chuck's "Butterscotch" is a funky instrumental workout that features some of his most incisive and inspired soloing. His familiar bent double-stops are all over this one, but he rarely soloed as forcefully or passionately as he does here. Despite claiming to be "Recorded in London," five of this album's 13 tracks were made in Chicago with the Jules Blattner Group, whom Chuck knew from their performances at the Butterscotch Lounge in St. Louis. This track is supposedly his reworking of Blattner's own "Butterscotch Twist," though it's hard to see any connection beyond the title.

TULANE
Back Home (1970)

Chuck's return to Chess Records in 1970 after a few years at the Mercury label saw him update his sound once again. The harmonica playing of "Boogie" Bob Baldori dominates many of these later recordings, relegating Chuck's guitar work to the background, as on this taut rocker about Johnny and Tulane, a headshop-owning couple busted by the cops for their illicit stash. As a result, the thrill comes not from Chuck's guitar playing but from his gift for storytelling, something that was in short supply in the later years of his recording career.

WUDEN'T ME
Rockit (1979)



Racism was a subtext in Chuck's earlier songs, like "Brown Eyed Handsome Man" and "Promised Land." It comes to the fore on this 1979 track, where he relates the tale of a young man down South who runs a stop sign and is tossed in jail after being refused his basic rights. Breaking out, he's pursued by a Grand Dragon posse and bloodhounds before a trucker bearing a swastika and KKK arm patch stops to give him a lift. Chuck is in wry humor on this rollicking country rocker and turns in some fine riffing on the chorus, but once again it's his gift for storytelling that makes it all work.

SWEET LITTLE *Rock & Rollers*

The sound of rock and roll began in the hands of Charles Edward Anderson Berry. Here are some of the guitars that helped him make history.

BY DAVID MEAD

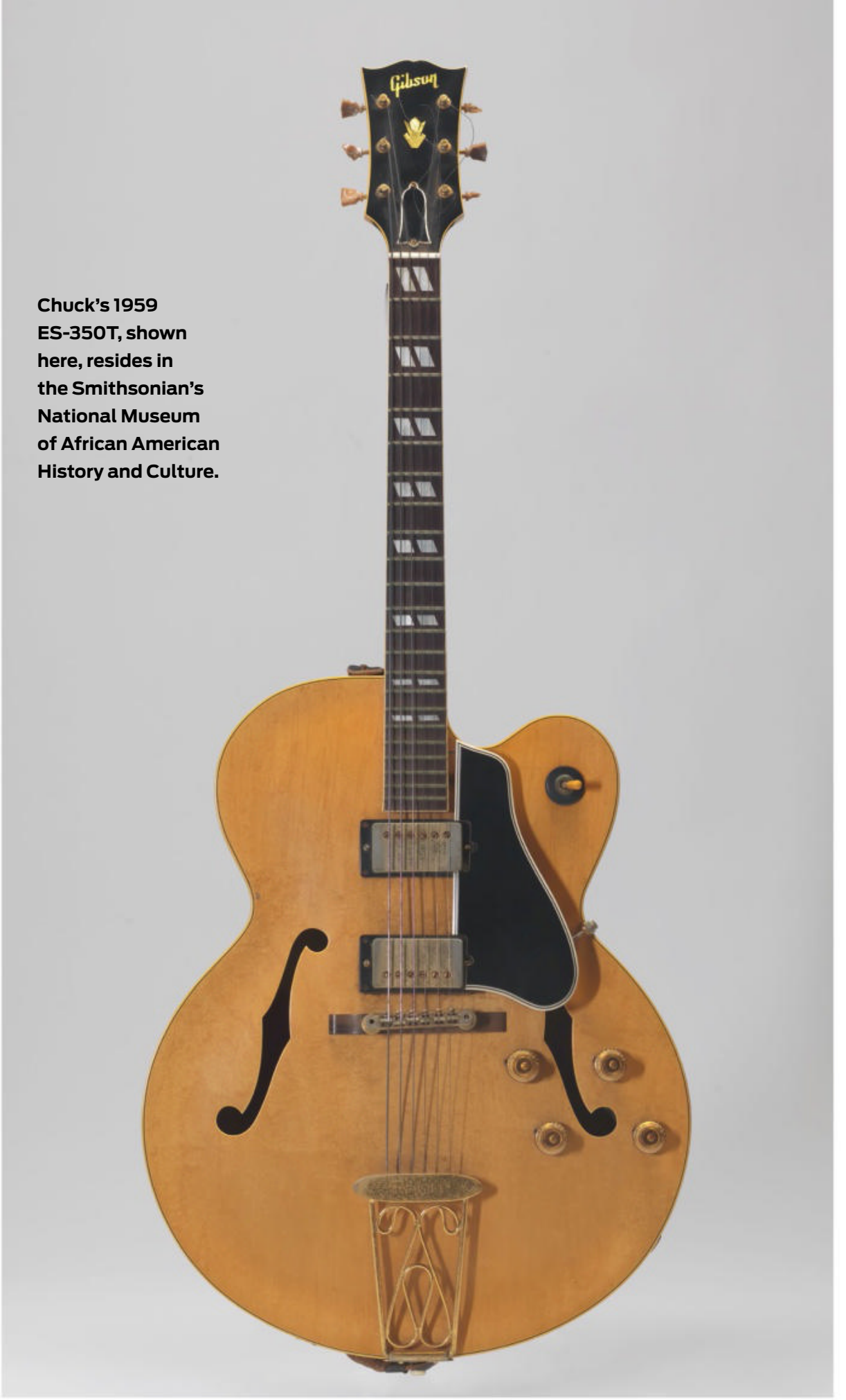
DON PAULSEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

When the Chess record label released Chuck Berry's "Maybellene" in 1955, a new sound was born. Berry had cleverly melded an old country tune with some up-tempo rhythm and blues, introduced some lyrics involving a car chase and the deal was done. But it was 1958's "Johnny B. Goode" that changed the face of popular music forever, with a guitar intro that would echo down the decades, influencing generations of guitar players. Chuck had the pick of the guitar hardware from the 1950s, and he quickly showed a preference for Gibson's thinline instruments, starting with the 1956 Gibson ES-350TN.

1956 GIBSON ES-350TN & 1959 GIBSON ES-350T

Of all the guitars that Chuck Berry used in his lifetime, two are predominant: the Gibson ES-350T and ES-335. The evolution of the ES-350 really began back in 1940 with the introduction of the ES-300, a 17-inch-wide archtop with a carved maple top and slant-mounted pickup, an elongated affair that traced a diagonal line between the bass and treble strings.

By 1947, the ES-350 had appeared in the catalog. It was essentially a cutaway version of the ES-300, but the somewhat unsightly, clunky pickup had been replaced with a P-90. In 1955, coinciding with the release of Chuck's first single, "Maybellene," a thinline version of the 350 – the ES-350T – was born into the new age of rock and roll (although it's documented that the actual guitar used for the recording session was a Gretsch Duo Jet). Sporting two P-90s, gold-plated hardware and a choice of sunburst or, in Chuck's case, Natural finish, the model had a further upgrade in mid 1957 when it received Gibson's brand-new humbucking pickups. Chuck has been pictured with both the P-90 and humbucker versions of the ES-350T and it should be noted that Eric Clapton, when appearing in the movie *Hail! Hail! Rock 'N' Roll*, for which the Stones' Keith Richards produced the music, allegedly went to great lengths to secure a 350T to play on screen.



Chuck's 1959 ES-350T, shown here, resides in the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

COLLECTION OF THE SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE, DONATION OF CHARLES E. BERRY.

The 1959 Gibson ES-350T shown here is Chuck's own instrument, which is in the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. He donated the instrument in 2011, but he didn't make it easy. Kevin Strait, curator for the African American History Museum, recalled his visit to the guitar legend at his Berry Park estate in Wentzville, Missouri, on November 11 of that year. Strait's mission was to receive Chuck's bequest of a Cadillac and a guitar. But the first words Chuck spoke let him know the challenge ahead: "He shook my hand, smiled warmly and in a tone that was both delicate and forceful, uttered — 'I'm not giving you a single thing,'" Strait recalled for *Smithsonian* magazine.

It took the better part of the day, but Strait won Chuck over, starting with his

pitch: "I simply told him that we wanted to put him in a gallery with Duke Ellington, so that the millions of people who walk through this museum would forever associate his contributions in historical accord with the great names of popular music."

After a few hours' conversation about jazz, the Occupy movement and the civil rights era's black leaders, Chuck had a change of heart. "He was eating his lunch, when he suddenly said: 'All right,'" Strait related. Chuck let the guitar and a Caddy — a 1973, candy-apple red convertible El Dorado — go with a warning to watch after both his gifts and his legacy. "Because I plan to live to be 100," he said, "and I'll come see you if you don't."

GIBSON ES-335, 345 & 355

It soon became apparent that Chuck had a fondness for the ES-335, as well as its sister models, the ES-345 and ES-355. The release of the ES-335 in 1958 was the same year that Chuck had further hits with "Sweet Little Sixteen," "Carol" and, of course, "Johnny B. Goode." In addition to its thinline body with a double cutaway, the 335 had the nascent humbucking pickups and a 19th-fret neck joint that provided access to the guitar's upper register. Chuck's choice of color was Cherry, which officially entered the catalog in 1959, the original finishes on launch being Gibson's standard of Sunburst or Natural.

The ES-345TD followed its sibling 335 in 1959 and had stereo electronics and Gibson's infamous Varitone switching system, which offered six preset tonal alternatives via capacitors wired into circuitry under the hood. The Varitone didn't impress the guitarist fraternity, with many players adopting Position 1 (bypass) permanently or disabling the circuitry entirely.

Chuck later used a Wine Red 1978 ES-355, the model that had become associated more with B.B. King, which was at one time stolen from his house and later returned to him by the super-efficient St. Louis Police.

GRETSCH 6130 ROUNDUP

In the 1956 film *Rock, Rock, Rock*, Chuck plays "You Can't Catch Me" on a Gretsch 6130 Roundup, one of a number of Gretsch models that he used. In addition to the Duo Jet he played on "Maybellene," Chuck owned a 6120 and a White Falcon (see right), but the Roundup, identifiable by its unique belt buckle tailpiece, is a curio. Introduced in 1954, the guitar shared the body shape of the Duo Jet, with two pickups but with a distinctly Western theme decor, including a *G* brand and tooled leather sides.

GIBSON FLYING V

Throughout Chuck's career, he can be seen with models that fell outside the regimen of Gibson's 3-Series guitars. One such interloper was another instrument introduced in 1958, the Flying V, although shipping records show that only 81 models were made that year and even fewer — 17 — in 1959. The first Vs had korina bodies, but Chuck has been pictured with the post '67 mahogany variety, with its distinctive shape, twin humbuckers, all frets clear of the body, and chrome hardware.

GRETSCH G6136DC WHITE FALCON

Introduced in 1955, the White Falcon reigns alongside the 6120 as one of the most popular archtop models the company made. The double-cutaway version followed in 1962, featuring the same deluxe appointments of its forbear, such as Gretsch's renowned Filter'Tron pickups and optional Project-O-Sonic stereo functionality. The double-cut feature here means that this version of the Falcon shares a lot of visual characteristics with Chuck's beloved 3-Series Gibsons, which may explain why he owned one.

Mike Stern performing at Blue Note in Milan, Italy, October 14, 2021

SERGIONE INFUSO/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

STERNER STUFF

Five years after a misstep on a New York City street left him with broken bones and nerve damage in his right hand, **Mike Stern** perseveres one gig at a time.

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

I **FIRST WITNESSED** Mike Stern onstage 31 years ago in his sideman role with Miles Davis at New York's Avery Fisher Hall back in 1981. This was Miles' eagerly awaited "comeback" gig after a five-year absence from performing and recording (a period depicted in the 2015 Don Cheadle feature film, *Miles Ahead*). As Robert Palmer reported the next day in his July 6 *New York Times* review, "It began promisingly with the trumpeter playing a tartly quizzical muted solo, accompanied by terse, restrained playing from his band. Then, abruptly, Mr. Davis gave a signal and his guitarist, Mike Stern, hit a series of ringing chords. The contrast between Mr. Davis's refined playing and Mr. Stern's heavy metal bombast was jarring. But it was the only recurring element in the group's first piece, which was a series of solos over a loose, splashy funk rhythm, interrupted by the trumpeter's signals and the guitarist's power chording at apparently arbitrary intervals."

Little did Palmer know that Mr. Stern's "heavy metal bombast" was a directive from the leader, who commanded the guitarist to "turn it up or turn it off!" during their set. And while Stern was very capable of delivering the kind of post-Hendrixian six-string assaults that Miles was looking for in that comeback band (with bassist Marcus Miller, saxophonist Bill Evans, percussionist Mino Cinelu and drummer Al Foster), the guitarist was also someone who loved the warmth, harmonic sophistication and sheer swing of Jim Hall, one of his preeminent role models.

Stern has successfully combined both aesthetics throughout his own career, which

included appearances in Billy Cobham's group, Jaco Pastorius' group, Steve Smith's Vital Information and Harvie Swartz's Urban Earth before he finally released his 1986 Atlantic Records debut, *Upside Downside*. He subsequently played with Steps Ahead, Vital Information, Michael Brecker, David Sanborn, Joe Henderson, the Brecker Brothers and the all-star Four Generations of Miles band. To date, Stern has released 18 albums as a leader or co-leader, including collaborations with fellow guitar hero Eric Johnson (2014's *Electric*) and keyboardist fusion pioneer Jeff Lorber (2019's *Eleven*).

But Stern's career was put in serious jeopardy on July 3, 2016, when he was hailing a cab in front of his Manhattan apartment and tripped over some concealed construction debris, fracturing both humerus bones in his arms. He required multiple surgeries to repair

"MY RIGHT HAND WITH THE PICK HAS BEEN THE PROBLEM, SO I HAVE TO USE GLUE TO BE ABLE TO HOLD THE PICK NOW"

significant nerve damage in his right hand that prevented him from holding a guitar pick.

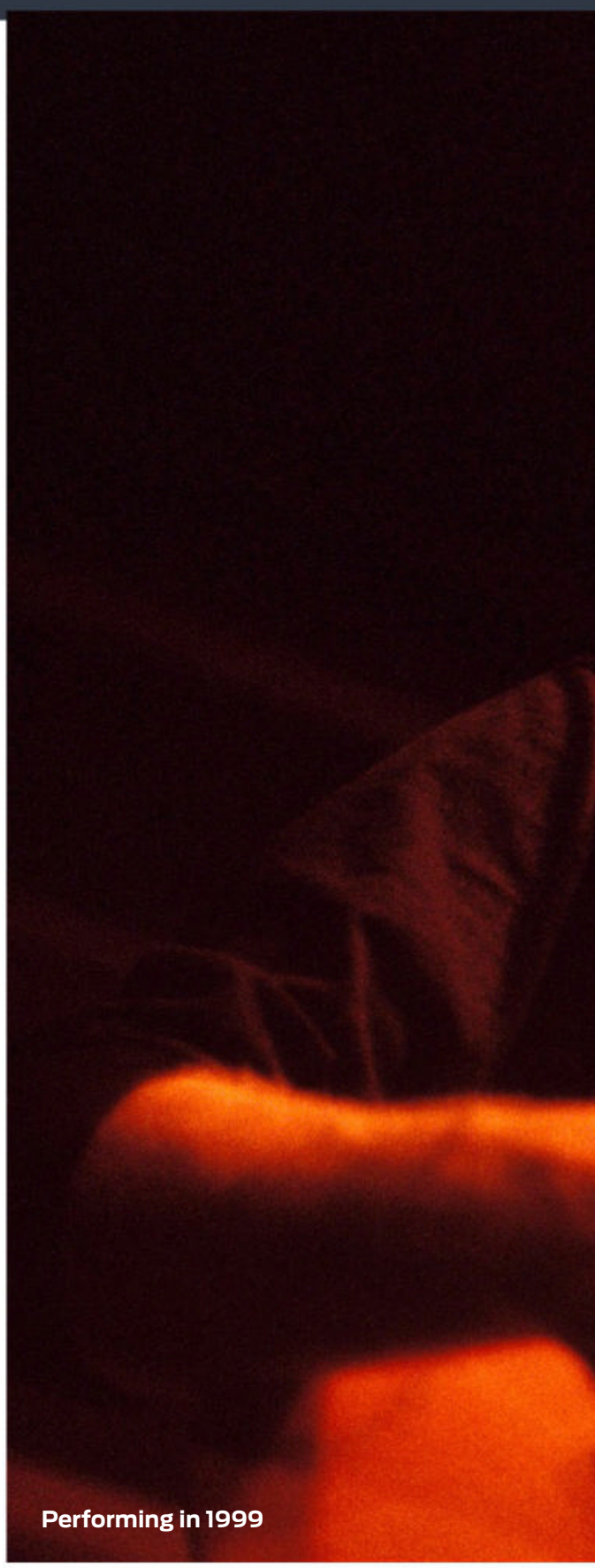
Stern emerged in late October that year to perform at the Blue Note nightclub in Manhattan with Chick Corea, playing seated and wearing a black glove outfitted with Velcro attached to a Velcro-fitted pick. Following a second surgery, he gained more control of his nerve-damaged right hand by gluing and taping his fingers to a pick. In January of 2017, six months after his accident, Stern began recording his next album, the ironically titled *Trip*. Some of the song titles on that comeback album including "Screws" and "Scotch Tape and Glue" were tongue-in-cheek references to his new procedure of having to "strap in and glue up" in order to hold a pick. Despite the debilitating injuries, Stern's signature speed and "chops of doom" are still very much in evidence on that 2017 album.

After persevering through Covid-19 and the complete lockdown of nightclubs in New York City from March 2020 to July 1, 2021, Stern is back playing every Monday and Wednesday night at his beloved 55 Bar (affectionately known as The Dump) in the West Village. And after lengthy tenures with Atlantic Records, Heads Up and Concord, he is now preparing new material for an upcoming recording for Shanachie.

Meanwhile, the guitarist has a prominent role on *Going For It*, an archival recording by the Harvie S Trio featuring legendary drummer Alan Dawson. Recorded at the 1369 club in 1985, it's a classic example of Stern at the peak of his game, playing jazz standards in an intimate club setting, just as he continues to do every Monday and Wednesday night at the 55 Bar in New York City.

You mentioned that you recently had another surgery that has improved matters for your right hand, in terms of holding the pick.

Yeah, it's very rare to get permanent nerve damage from something like that accident I had, where I broke both bones in my shoulders. I'm lucky I got a great orthopedist, Dr. Alton Barron, a shoulder-elbow-hand specialist in New York City. He's worked with a lot of musicians, including Elvis Costello and Bruce Springsteen. They had issues and he helped them out, and a whole bunch of classical musicians as well. He got me playing right away, which was really difficult because he went very slowly, step by step. He wasn't able to give me back too much right away, but gradually it got better and better. And now the fourth surgery on my hand helped a lot with my thumb. It's just in a better position now. The procedure is a weird tendon transfer, where they just kind of rewire you. Apparently, you have extra tendons in your hand that are either redundant — where there's two doing



Performing in 1999

ROBIN LITTLE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

the job of one — or they sit around unemployed until such time as something like this happens. So Dr. Barron was able to put me back together in a very satisfactory way, even though now I'm feeling like Frankenstern — kind of rewired and half bionic.

Did you have nerve damage in both hands?

No, thank god. The left hand is totally cool, so I can still do all that stuff on the fretboard. My right hand with the pick has been the problem, so I have to use glue to be able to hold the pick now.

That hasn't changed. Probably never will. I just can't grip it in the same way. There's just not enough strength there, but it's better. I still have to use the glue, but I don't lean on it 100 percent. I've got some strength to really grip now.

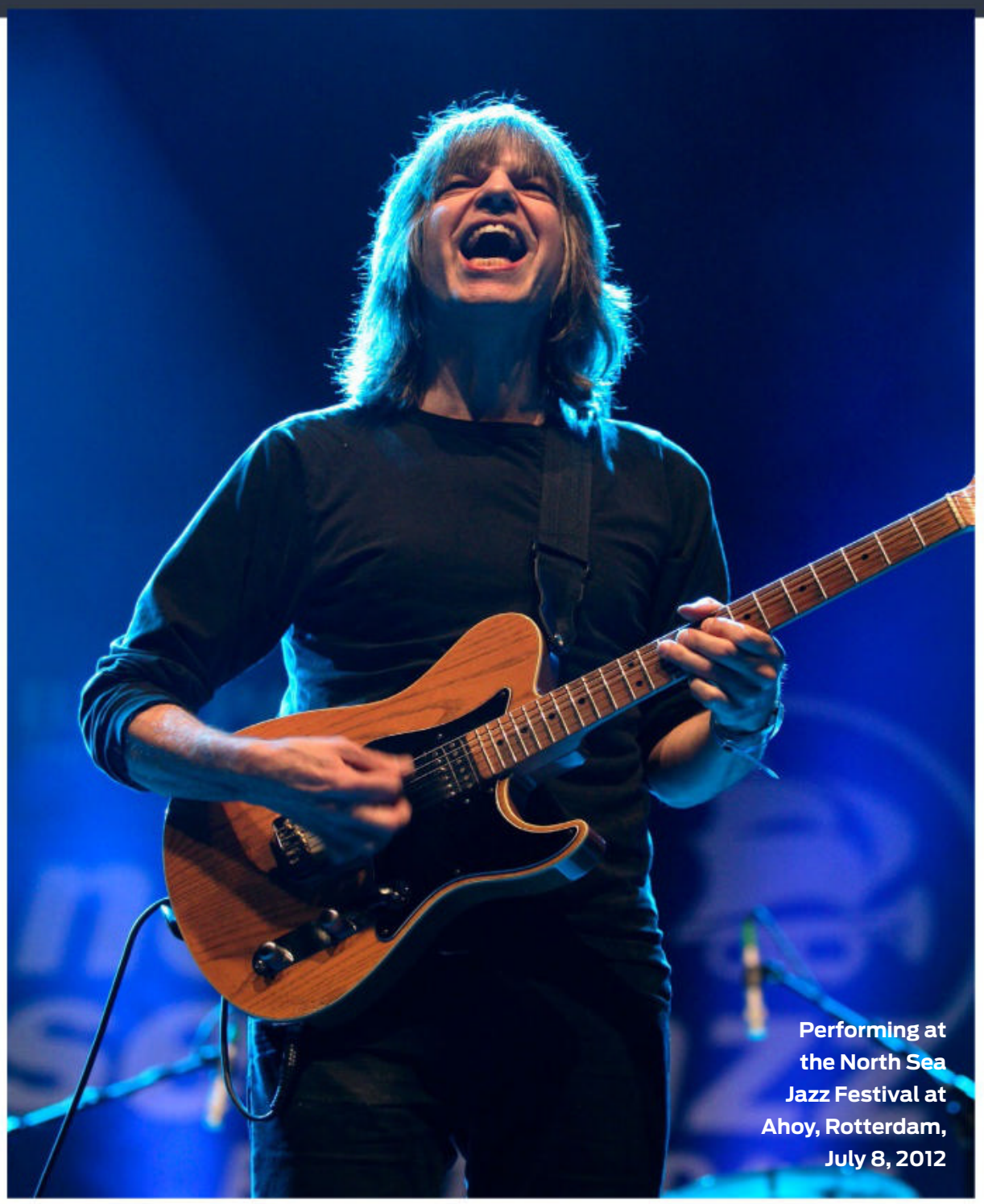
From listening to your last two records — *Trip* and *Eleven* — it's hard to hear that you suffered any setbacks at all. You're still killing it.
Yeah. This accident happened five years ago and over the past four years or so, no one's even mentioned it. People hear me play and they say, "Wow, what injury?" Or if people know about it, they say, "I can't tell the difference." I notice, of course. It's a use of different muscles that feels different in certain things I play. And it's hard. There's stuff that I used to be able to do that I can't do in the same exact way anymore. But the idea is you learn and you compensate. You figure out a way around it. The one thing I used to do a little bit more is play with my fingers. I was more a pick guy, but sometimes I would put the pick in the palm of my hand and use my fingers for chording. And I can't do that anymore. But there's a way my doctor can fix that too, sometime down the road.

How soon after your first surgery did you begin playing again in public?
I went on a long tour about two months after the accident, and I continued playing on the road up until the pandemic. Sometimes if I had some time off, I would do another little surgery, and it helped matters. Every time the doctor did something, it would help. He didn't want to jump in and do everything all at once. I'm just glad I'm able to keep playing. I certainly wasn't going to give

this stuff up, and I'm never going to give it up, until I drop.

That's interesting what you said about playing with fingers, because on that new Harvie S Trio live album, documenting that gig from 1985 at the 1369 Club in Boston, you're playing beautiful chord melodies on Horace Silver's "Peace" and on John Coltrane's "Moment's Notice." There's a lot of fingerstyle playing on that record.
Yeah, there's more of that going on. And some of that is with the pick also; it's just lightly played. But it's kind of a combination. That record was just a really special night. I've done a ton of that kind of stuff over the years. Since the early '80s I've been playing at the 55 Bar in New York, just stretching out over standards with different really great musicians that just want to play. You know, no one's getting rich at those little clubs, but it's really fun to play there. You can do what you want, with no pressure. It just feels like those are the places where you can really find some new stuff. Even if you play the same tunes, you kind of change them up a little bit and you end up finding new stuff on everything, whether it's a blues or a ballad or just swinging on a standard.

This gig with Harvie S and Alan Dawson was a similar thing. And I had never played with Alan Dawson before. I certainly had known about him, and I might have met him once when I was going to school at Berklee. He was the main percussion teacher there, the head of the drum department; an amazing player and an amazing teacher who also wrote some instructional books that are kind of like a Bible for drummers. And so we hit it without a rehearsal. We had three nights there and someone had taped it on a reel-to-reel recorder. We weren't in a studio situation or even a remote trailer for live recording, but it just came out really good. And it documented a kind of thing that I've been doing for years — that little club gig that I never really recorded before. Just kind of caught in the act, so to speak. My chops were really 100 percent, and it was a good night just generally. The rhythm section, man! Those guys just hooked up so well together.



Performing at the North Sea Jazz Festival at Ahoy, Rotterdam, July 8, 2012

And you really linked up with Alan Dawson, even though you say it was the first time you ever played together. There was a moment in "Like Someone in Love" where you both kick it into double time simultaneously. There's some kind of telepathy going on there.
Alan is something else, man. There's a video on YouTube of him and Sonny Rollins that is so swinging it's ridiculous. It was really a pleasure to play with him. You know, he was sitting there in his suit and tie, and I turn on the distortion pedal occasionally, and he'd say, "Whichever way you wanna go." And when the rhythm section is that supportive, it really feels so inspiring that it's effortless. So this record is just a really good example of an incredibly sensitive, supportive, strong rhythm section. It was really a nice hookup for the whole three nights. I just remember feeling so comfortable.

And Harvie, I had played with him a bunch at that point. He's just such a solid, supportive bass player and also a very creative soloist. He's done so much with so many different cats — Dexter Gordon, Sonny Stitt, Thad Jones, Jim Hall, Sheila Jordan. He's been around forever, and he's wonderful to play with. And Harvie and Alan Dawson really hooked up well together. It's very inspiring when that happens — all three of us at once. I love that trio setting, and I don't go far away from it. When I play my own tunes with my band, I usually add a saxophone, so it's really still a trio when it's time for me to solo. With a trio

GREETSIA TENT/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

Onstage in Milan with Bill Evans

there's a flexibility that doesn't exist with anything else. And just playing standards is something I've done so much before. On that Harvie S Trio album, we did one original of mine, "Bruze," which I wrote a long time ago for Tiger Okoshi, the Japanese trumpeter [*it was later recorded on the 1988 Bob Berg album,* Cycles]. Everything else was standards. And those guys just amazingly do what they do, which is follow the music.

When you listen to this document from 35 years ago, is your guitar sound different from what it is now?

Things have changed some. I'm using a different guitar, for one thing. But in a basic way, I've always stuck with what works. I've always liked a very vocal kind of sound, but clear, where you can hear every note. But I don't want every note necessarily to be articulated in the same way. I like it to feel like the way we talk or the way we sing. When you talk, you don't accent every syllable. So I like that in terms of how I try to play. You don't hit every note the same way; you've got dynamics within each note of each phrase. I go for more of that flow. I've always had that, and I try to keep it. I always tell students, "If you use pedals, if you use a certain kind of a sound with the amp in terms of adding more treble

"PEOPLE HEAR ME PLAY AND THEY SAY, 'WOW, WHAT INJURY?' YOU LEARN AND YOU COMPENSATE. YOU FIGURE OUT A WAY AROUND IT"

or taking the treble off... Whatever works for you, try to get your heart out there. Because that's what it's about. Don't get in the way of what you want to communicate."

Do you remember what your setup might have been on those three nights in Boston back in 1985?

It's similar to what I'm using now. I'm always using Boss pedals. I think I used a Boss DS-1 and a Boss DD-3 on that gig, and I used two amps for that stereo sound. And I had this [*Yamaha*] SPX90 [*multi-effects processor*] that I really liked. It has a harmonizer patch, not a chorus, for a slightly different effect. And it's balanced to be more or less 50-50 with the straight sound and the chorus effect, which adds a bit more body. It has that kind of flow where you don't hear it in your face. And you can play in a small place and it still sounds kind of big because of that. So I've always used that kind of setup, and it's also worked in the much bigger festivals.

You've always favored that slight touch of chorus.

Yeah, the very first chorus thing I had was called the Rotosound, which produced a Leslie kind of effect. It was a pedal I got from Nils Lofgren, who was a friend of mine in Washington, D.C., where I grew up. I was already very much into jazz, but I was also doing some rock gigs, some blues gigs. Nils was well known in the Washington, D.C. area, and then later on he started playing with Bruce Springsteen. But he used to play this Rotosound pedal and I really liked that. And I also liked when Hendrix played with a Leslie. When I hear Jimi

SERGIONE INFUSO/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Hendrix, he has that vocal kind of sound that I emulated, obviously to a more extreme level. But I grew up checking that stuff out, so I kind of kept that kind of vibe through the years.

And, of course, I liked Pat Metheny's stereo sound when he first came out, and he had all that stuff to make his guitar more vocal [*including a Lexicon PCM 60 reverb*]. I used to hear Pat play in little places in Boston with Jaco and Bob Moses before they did Pat's first ECM record together, and I loved his sound. And I always loved Jim Hall and Wes Montgomery for their legato sound. Wes did it with his thumb. He got a very vocal, round kind of sound. Jim Hall used to do it by the way he would set up his band and the kind of amp and guitar he would use [*a Gibson ES-175 early on, then a D'Aquisto and finally a Sadowsky Jim Hall signature model*].

For me, a lot of getting that legato sound has to do with the way that I pick. It's not real loud, not really hard. It's really light, because that's the way I like to hear it — more like a horn player, in some ways — unless I need it to be stronger. If I really want a stinging note, then I have the option of doing that. But fundamentally, I'm playing as smooth as possible, but not without dynamics. It's more difficult to get that kind of roundness and warmth with a solidbody

At the Carefusion Jazz Festival, Brooklyn, New York City, June 19, 2010

guitar. I used to play a Gibson ES-175 through just one amp, but then I couldn't crank it if I wanted to play the blues and rock a little bit. And rather than schlep a bunch of different guitars around to use different things on different tunes on the road — that's really next to impossible, especially nowadays — I just had one guitar that kind of worked for every situation. Originally, it was Roy Buchanan's Telecaster, which I bought from Danny

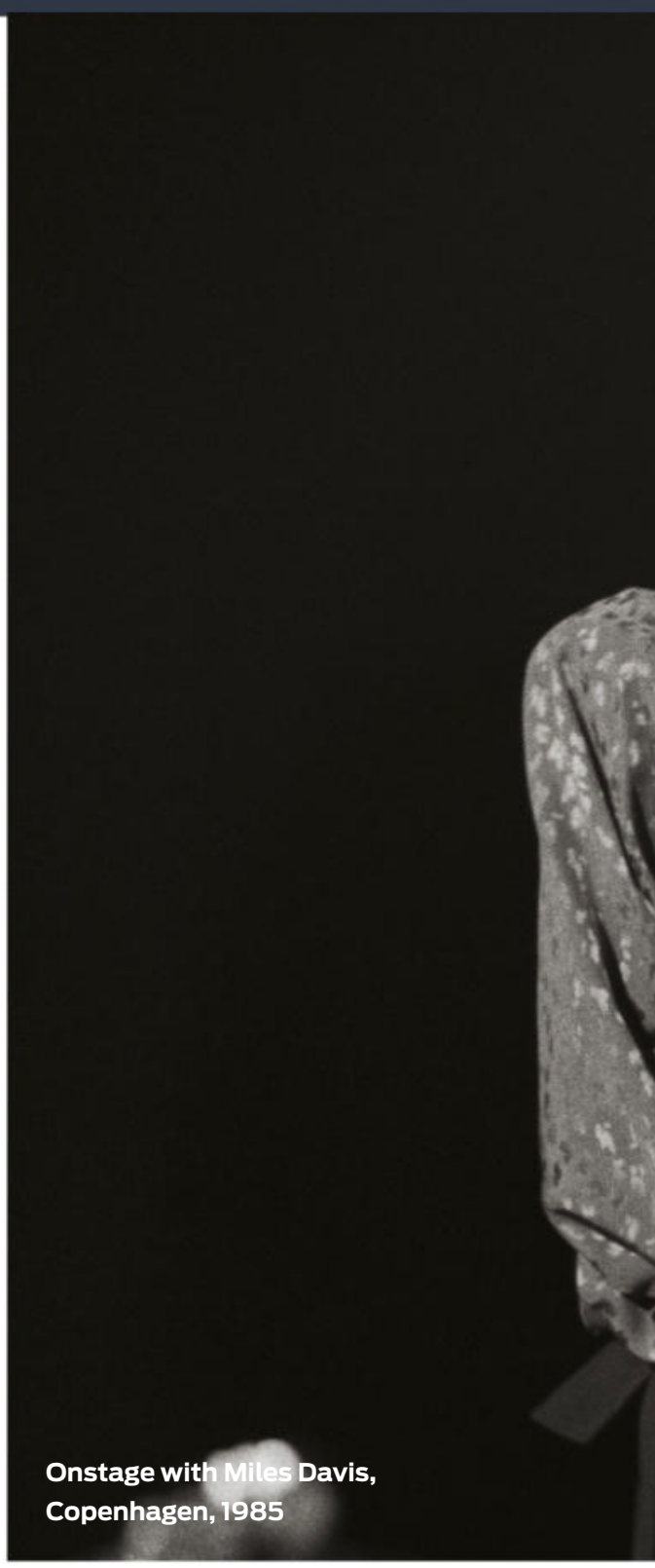
"I ALWAYS TELL STUDENTS, WHATEVER WORKS FOR YOU, TRY TO GET YOUR HEART OUT THERE. BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT IT'S ABOUT"

Gatton. That got stolen from me at gunpoint in Boston, and then somebody made a copy of that, which I used for years. I still have that guitar.

But then Yamaha wanted to make a Mike Stern signature model, so they took that copy of the Roy Buchanan guitar and made something similar and did a great job. I've been using that ever since. But it's always been a Tele-style guitar for me. And I'm still going for that kind of a warmer sound that's more vocal or horn-like. In recent years, Pat has taken some of the treble off his guitar, so it's very warm now. I don't want to take that much treble off. I still like a little bit more of that just to give it some clarity. But I still want that roundness at the same time.

Are you still using Boss pedals?

Yeah, that's basically what I've always used. I have two Boss DD3 digital delay pedals [*one on a short delay for reverb effects, the other on a longer delay*]. And instead of a Boss DS-1, which is the distortion pedal I used to use, I'm using a Boss SD-1 Super Overdrive pedal now. The Boss pedals really work. And I have a chorus effect in the Yamaha SPX as well.

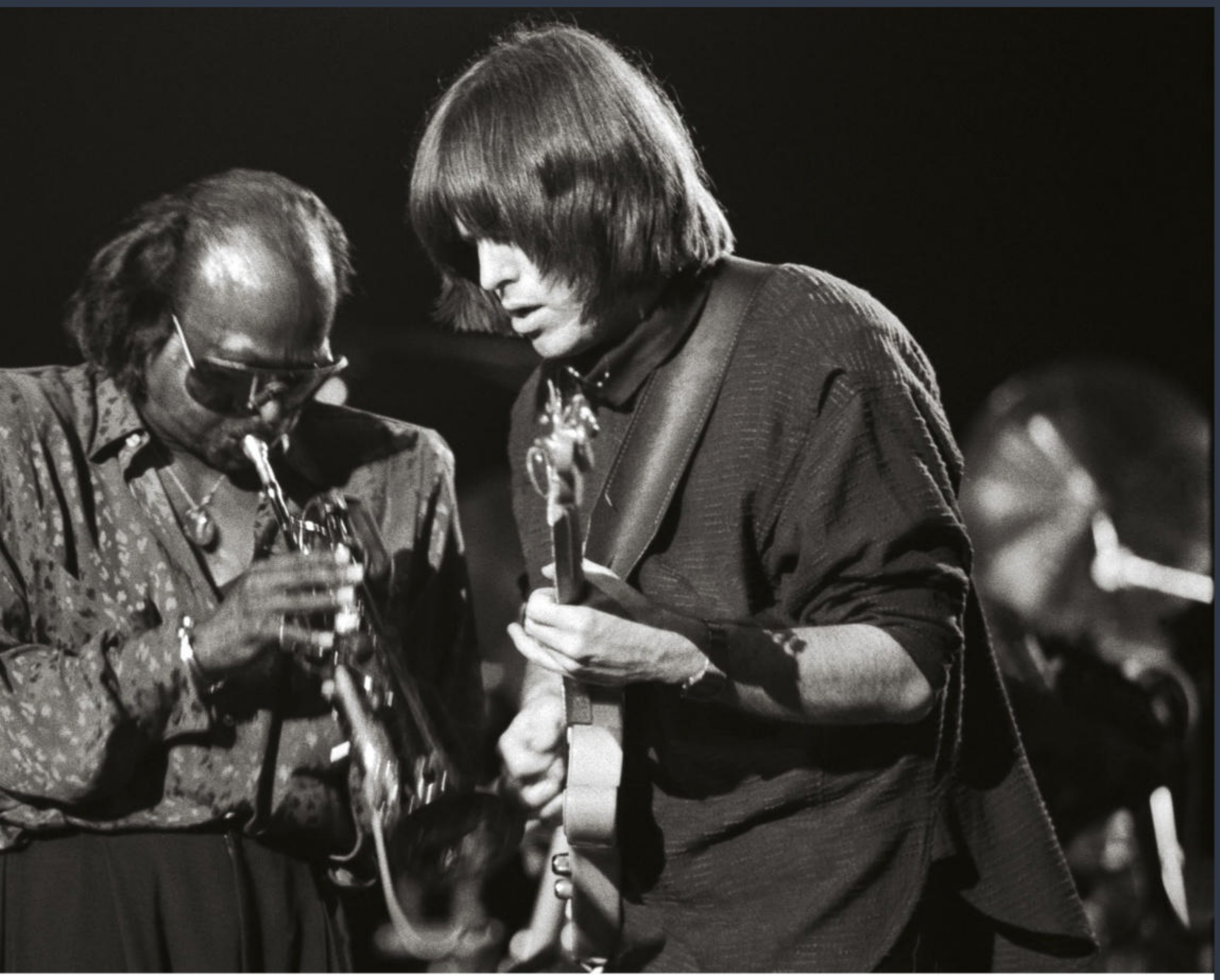


Onstage with Miles Davis, Copenhagen, 1985

Thinking back on that Harvie S Trio gig from 1985, where were you at that point in your career?

I had just been playing again with Miles for the second time. I had played with Jaco, then I went into rehab. I had to clean up because I was a mess. So I had just gotten clean and everything was really coming more into focus for me. I was getting high from the music more so than before, when there was other stuff I was getting high from. There was still plenty of good stuff that kind of got through during those days, but it was less consistent. And this gig with Harvie was a really special night, where everything was clicking with the whole band. I was in the process of recording that first record I did for Atlantic

AL PEREIRA/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES



JAN PERSSON/GETTY IMAGES

Records, *Upside Downside*, and I was beginning to play with Bob Berg in that band that we had for a long time, with Dennis Chambers on drums and Jeff Andrews and then later Lincoln Goines on bass. But we kept it together for a number of years, and that was really fun.

So at the time of this 1369 gig, had you already started playing at the 55 Bar?
Yeah, I'd been playing there even before I went into rehab. I was still playing with Miles when Jeff Andrews found the 55 Bar on Christopher Street. And I was still living above 55 Grand Street at the time. There's no correlation between those two places; one's in the West Village, the other's in SoHo. It just happened that the addresses of both places were 55. My wife, Leni, and I moved above the 55 Grand Street when I first started playing with Miles in 1980. I played with him for about three years off and on and then joined Jaco's group after that. And we were still living in that place above the club at 55 Grand Street. During the time I was playing with Miles, Jeff Andrews said, "There's a guy who wants to start music at this bar that's been around forever." So we started playing there around 1984. We started off playing duo and then later on we got a really good drummer named Yves Gerard, who played with brushes and chopsticks because we were scared we were going to get kicked out for playing too loud. So we started to play there with the drums, and when no one complained, we realized that we could play at different dynamic levels. And then a lot of people started playing down there after that, and it kept happening. Ownership of the club changed a couple of times over the years, and 37 years later I'm still playing there. It's a really cool scene, and we're really working hard to keep it happening. It looks like it survived the pandemic, so I guess we'll see what happens next there.

You no doubt canceled a lot of touring in 2020 because of the pandemic. Do you have any plans to resume touring?
I've got some gigs in March with Randy Brecker and Dennis Chambers. Other than that, I'm playing at the 55 Bar every Monday and Wednesday night.

SOUL CAPTAIN

Luther Dickinson gives a tour of the North Mississippi Allstars' existential party cruise on *Set Sail*.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

LUTHER DICKINSON IS always inspirational as a player and as a person. Listening to him makes you want to play better, sound better and be kinder. His benevolent spirit shines through in the music, lyrics, and vocals, regardless of the project. Constantly sought out, he has been consistently prolific like few others since his primary vessel, the North Mississippi Allstars, started tearing up juke joints a quarter century ago. Dickinson is an eager collaborator. He teamed up with Robert Randolph for *The Word*, and spent a few years soaring with Rich Robinson in the Black Crowes. He's produced Samantha Fish, Otha Turner and the Honey Island Swamp Band. Wherever he goes, the tones are true and he sounds truly authentic playing an array of roots music, from Creole funk to his forte, Hill Country blues. Dickinson's got chops boucoup, but the heart of his appeal is a boatful of soul in every note, and it's in full effect on the Allstars' lucky 13th album, *Set Sail* (New West). Co-captain Cody Dickinson provides a steady keel on the skins as always, and the other half of the crew is new since 2019's Grammy-nominated *Up and Rolling*. Bassist Jesse Williams succeeds Carl Dufrene, who passed away in 2020. Lamar Williams Jr., son of Allman Brothers bassist Lamar Williams, hopped aboard to lend his expressive voice to the chorus that also includes Memphis R&B legend William Bell.

Luther Dickinson onstage with the Allman Family Revival at the Fillmore, in San Francisco, December 7, 2019. (right) The cover of *Set Sail*.

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

Dickinson delivers some of the slinkiest slide playing of his fruitful career on the epic title track, which sets a mystical course from the get go. Laced with lovely strings and horns, "Set Sail Part II" takes the journey further out midway through the album's seamless flow. The angelic centerpiece "Didn't We Have a Time" has an introduction of cascading guitar-peggios that sounds like opening heaven's gate. Listen to its soothing pulse, wistful lyrics and melody and try not to get misty.

The counterbalance to all the soul searching is a gang of bangin' house parties taking place along the Allstars' adventure. Multi-talented Cody contributes the entire rhythm section, including Nile Rodgers–like funk guitar on "See the Moon." Luther brings a Crescent City flare to the syncopated staccato riff bouncing throughout "Juicy Juice." The tribal tale "Rabbit Foot" summons a spooky cosmic swamp vibe that brings Papa Mali's version of Isaac Hayes' "Do Your Thing" to mind.

Luther brought mostly new instruments onboard for what he described as a "transitional record." He spoke to us upon an early return from another family affair, the Allman Family Revival tour, which had its last four West Coast dates rescheduled to late February due to health and safety protocols.

How did you wind up with such a soulful sound on *Set Sail*?

It's hard to know where you stand when the world is constantly moving underneath your feet. We've all had time to do some evaluation, and I wanted to leave a message in the music for my daughters in case they ever want to understand where I stood.

Cody, Jesse and I got zoned in on tour right before the pandemic hit. We were hot, and we kept stoking that fire by working on instrumental stuff, flipping files back and forth during quarantine. Lamar had joined us on the very last night in Atlanta, so *Set Sail* is a cool extension of where our road trip had ended. I was listening hard to Prince and James Brown, as well as Daft Punk and Tame Impala. Lamar's vocals accentuated the soul and took it to a whole new level.

Luckily, the lyrics were almost done. I'd been working on them for years. I was also writing the score for a documentary about American terrorist Eric Robert Rudolph called *Onward Christian Soldier*. That's where I learned how to improvise to a click track and let the music sort of shape itself until there was something happening. I grew up trying to write songs, so this way of creating music for film into Apple Logic made my eyes open wide.

With Lamar Williams Jr. (left) and Devon Allman (right) at the Allman Family Revival

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

How did you develop the two-part title track?

Another big influence was the live footage on YouTube of Bill Withers where he's on acoustic and the backing band is playing super quiet, but funky and intense. That inspired me, and I got a Baxendale-converted Harmony nylon-string that literally took my breath away when I opened the box. Playing nylon-string is new to me, and that's now my favorite guitar. It's on almost every song and was the genesis of each song. I sat with that Harmony and the lyric book and worked out the arrangements, singing a scratch vocal along to a click track.

On the electric side, I came to a realization. After a lifetime of trying to match amp tremolos to the timing of the track, I recorded direct so I could set the tremolo in Logic to match the tempo. Now it sits right in the groove. I re-amped the guitar signal by sending it out to my Category 5 amps to get tube tones. We developed a combo called the LD20 and another one that's more like a little Champ. I use the larger one for cleaner tones and push the smaller one for dirtier tones. Onstage I'll split the signal to both, often using bigger amps. There's a more powerful Cat 5 LD50 head that has an expression pedal for dialing in the tremolo speed, plus an even more powerful LD100, as well as a Lizzys 100-watter that I'll use in a large venue. I'm done with half-stacks and use 2x12 cabinets now. In the studio, I used a Coles 4038 ribbon mic on the Harmony nylon-string most of the time, and I'd use Coles to mic amps as well. The electric guitar story on "Set Sail" is kind of hilarious.

"THE FIRE OF YOUTH IS THE FUEL FOR ROCK AND ROLL, AND PLAYING MULTI-GENERATIONAL MUSIC HELPS KEEP THE FIRE UNDER YOUR ASS"

Luther and Cody Dickinson

WYATT MCSPADDEN

How so?

Well for starters, the song is in the key of B♭, which is great for vocals but can be weird on guitar. I didn't feel like using a capo, so I grabbed my cheap Hondo black Strat-style guitar, like the one Ad-Rock [*Adam Horovitz*] uses in the Beastie Boys, put it in Spanish G tuning and raised everything a step and a half. I didn't want to tune any other guitars up that high. I figured I'd throw a scratch track down to fill up some space, but I was so inspired doing that slide solo and the outro on "Part II." My daughter was running around behind me, and following the flow of her spirit always helps me out creatively. It's my favorite solo I've ever recorded. Cutting that slide track was so casual, quick and fun, but it took me a week to clean up the signal from those cheap single-coil pickups full of buzzing and clicking. Those swells aren't from a volume pedal, those are all the fades I had to edit in because the attack was so noisy.

The playing is wonderfully out of the box, with lots of interesting phrases and some slippery slide glissandos.

Thinking about the guitar fretboard horizontally can be hipper than thinking about it vertically, because the melody is there. It gives the phrasing a vocal quality like Sacred Steel, as well as players like Fred McDowell, Blind Willie Johnson, George Harrison and like-minded fingerstylist Robby Krieger. If you can connect your ear and your mind with your heart and your hand playing intervals on one or two strings, then the whole guitar just kind of unlocks itself. It's easy to think in terms of chords and inversions, scales and positions, but really, it's all on one string, be it slide or fretting with fingers. And I'm not sure if there's much on "Set Sail," but I'm addicted to playing behind the slide, letting fretted notes pop out to provide something solid you can hang your hat on amidst all the squirrelly slide microtones.

How'd you create the howling swells on the lead guitar track for "Outside"?

I'm actually just playing with feedback. That's from a guitar I helped design with Gibson that they call a 330L, which is a fully hollow, long-scale guitar with humbuckers. It's a bad mofo for feedback, man. I'm just leaning into the amp, playing very soft and letting the swells blossom not quite all the way, right on the edge. I've developed that hollowbody slide sound over my whole career. It's like Fred McDowell doing Jimi Hendrix whammy bar.

But that throaty, midrange neck pickup sound has literally turned on me. I've played loud so long, with so much sustained feedback around 200Hz, that it literally hurts my ears. I can't take that frequency anymore. I've been changing up my tone for that and other reasons. A lot of the other tones on the record stem from the fact that I've fallen in love with the sound of Lollar's Regal pickups. Those wide-range-style pickups are so

clean, chimey, and bell-like that you can hear each note in every chord. It's such a pretty tone, like a gold foil, but a little more civilized. That is my new sound.

How'd you get so into this new tone?
Steve Selvidge, who plays with the Hold Steady, gave me a Strat-style guitar we call the Godson that he designed using a pair of Lollar Regals, and it turned me out! It's all over *Set Sail*. During quarantine, my friend Chris Roberts and I started making instruments we call Vibratone Guitars with those Lollar Regals. That wide-range sound is based on Fender's big, beautiful humbucker [*from the '72 Tele Deluxe*]. I had a Mexican Fender Thinline that I put Regals in as well, and that's the platform for one of the Vibratone guitars we're making. I'll be taking these guitars on the road as well. *Set Sail* represents the transition from my former sound of a hollow Gibson with either P-90s or humbuckers, to this cleaner, chimey tone heard on tunes like "Didn't We Have a Time." That's in Spanish B♭ tuning as well. The way Paul Westerberg uses open G tuning is genius, and that intro was definitely inspired by him. Being tuned up to B♭ is similar to when Keith Richards or Robert Johnson would tune to Spanish G and capo up a few frets.

Your father [*Jim Dickinson*] produced Westerberg, worked with Richards, and introduced you to so many fantastic musicians that schooled you on guitar. You mention on the album how you're now of similar age to many of them then, and the importance of handing wisdom down. How are you doing that, and who are your favorite young players picking it up?
I'll start with peers that are a few years younger than me. Colonel Bruce Hampton used to say that Derek Trucks was of the angel race, and my dad would say that [*Muscle Shoals keyboardist*] Spooner Oldham is an angel. So I'm a believer in the angel race of humans. But if Derek is an angel, then Duane Betts is a king among men. He knows his dad's [*Dickey Betts*] style, he knows Duane [*Allman*]'s style, and he's my favorite player to hear do the Jerry Garcia style as well. When he goes into a Dead thing, he's got such beautiful touch that makes it all his own.

I'd like to mention that this year marks the 10th anniversary of the Roots Rock Revival camp we started with [*the late Allman Brothers Band drummer*] Butch Trucks. That's where Brandon "Taz" Niederauer was discovered. He's got an old soul. He was young when he started, but he's like a founding member, and I'd be happy if he went on to teach there and carry on that legacy. Lara Cwass, David Sessions and William Bartumioli are fantastic young players from Roots Rock Revival that have taught me a thing or two. The fire of youth is the fuel for rock and roll, and playing multigenerational music helps keep the fire under your ass. Asher Belsky is another promising teenage player coming up out on the West Coast. There are so many great guitar players in the younger generation. It's exciting! The future of roots rock is in good hands.

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

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FOREVER '50s

Rockabilly's top cat talks about beating tinnitus, resurrecting Dick Dale, why you'll never catch him with a Strat, and why rockers can't play the 'billy.

BY HENRY YATES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RUSS HARRINGTON

THE YEARS MIGHT roll by, but in Brian Setzer's world, it's always the '50s. There's his quiff, still upstanding at 62. There's his rack of Gretsch antiquities, gleaming like the hubcaps of the hot rods parked on his driveway. And there are his lyrics, exploring a hinterland of diners, drive-ins, jukeboxes and switchblades. The kingpin of modern rockabilly can even use the term *cat*, without irony, and pull it off.

But the image of an artist preserved in aspic doesn't quite fit. Because while the twang is still the thang on the Stray Cats frontman's latest solo album, *Gotta Have the Rumble* (Surfdog Records), Setzer's arrangements and voicings also give the 'billy a decisive nudge onward. "When I take a whole different genre and put it into my rockabilly world," he tell *GP*, "that's what lights me up the most."

What's the significance of that album title, *Gotta Have the Rumble*?

Of course it's a reference to my motorcycles, which give me my peace and quiet, believe it or not. That's my meditation — I just hop on and ride. But then it became about the tinnitus I had going on and the bigger amps I had to use. So I thought, Well, *Gotta Have the Rumble* — that refers to both things.

How bad was the tinnitus?

It was driving me mad. Everything was getting louder onstage. I'd say to [*Stray Cats rhythm section, Slim*] Jim [*Phantom*] and Lee [*Rocker*], "Are you guys turning up?" "Nah, we're just playin', man." All of a sudden, it was like, Ah, it's my ears — they'd gone bad. It's a real thing and I had to address it. I saw an audiologist and I'm okay now, but for those people who don't have tinnitus, imagine a tea kettle going off in your head 24/7. Like, "Turn off the kettle!" "It's already off!" Everything was starting to fall apart. The guitar, the amps and me had all pretty much fallen apart. We needed a break.

What emotions does that condition bring up for a guitar player?

It's horrible. Never mind thinking about playing music again. Playing was actually a relief because it would take my mind off it. It was the quieter times that drove me nuts, y'know, when I tried to sleep or just go for a peaceful walk. It goes on all the time. It's maddening is all I can say. If I could recommend to all your readers, please, wear some earplugs, now! Because we didn't wear 'em. Over the years, you didn't question anything. You're in the next town: There's your guitar — get up there and rock 'n' roll!

What guitars did you bring into the studio this time?

It's pretty much all Gretsch. Because I find if I stray from my Gretsch arsenal, it doesn't sound like me. But here's the thing. I'm looking at three vintage Gretsch guitars right now: One doesn't play in tune. One has scratchy pickups. On the other, the Bigsby is broke, right? But when I get the itch and I want to go down to the studio, I don't want to mess around. So I have a newer black 6120 Setzer model. It's maybe four years old, and it plays so well. I picked up a '59, too, but when I plugged them both in, I preferred the new one. So I played that Setzer model on most of the new tracks you hear. Some of them are a '59, and on "Turn You On, Turn Me On," that's an old Duo Jet.

Why does Gretsch cast such a spell over you?

As a kid, listening to the radio, I felt like the most important thing was to have your own tone. At that

time, I was hearing Eric Clapton, Creedence Clearwater Revival — and I knew those players right away because of the guitar tone. So even back then, I realized I gotta get that together. A Gibson, to me, was too muddy; I didn't want that tone. And a Fender, to me, was too thin. But the Gretsch was right in between. It had the twang of the Fender and the fatness of the Gibson. It fit perfectly for me.

The Tele seems like it'd be great for rockabilly, too. Don't you like them?
I do like Telecasters. But it's funny with guitars: I like the way other people play 'em. I've always been fascinated with the looks of a Stratocaster. I love the way they look. They're midcentury modern art. Y'know, it looks like an old '50s coffee table. But I can't play 'em. I don't like the scale. It's got the middle pickup and the volume knob right in the way. I love the way other people play 'em. I just can't get a sound out of 'em.

Are the Gretsches worth the feedback?
I've never gotten a feedback out of 'em that I can't control. Part of the sound for me on the Gretsch is that I play with that extra gain. The sound comes back through the guitar, through the f-holes, so moving around the amp, you can play with sustain, you can play with overtones. That's why I never needed anything like an overdrive pedal — because if I wanted a little more gain, I'd just stand closer to the amp. And then if I wanted it to be more twangy, I'd just turn away from the amp. So I didn't need pedals.

How did the tinnitus affect your amp choice for this record?
I started out with smaller amps, but they just didn't have the rumble. So I went back to my tried-and-true '63 Bassmans. Those things are loud. And it was like, "There it is!" I also used the vibrato on an old Fender Bandmaster, and a Deluxe Reverb for the rockabilly traditional. Those three amps pretty much knocked it on the head.

You're not alone in your obsession with cars and guitars. Think Billy Gibbons and Jeff Beck. What's the appeal?
Jeff can build those damn hot rods from scratch. He almost cut off the tip of his finger once. I said to him, "You've gotta remember what's most important here!" With the hot rods, it's about individual expression. There's no two hot rods the same. You're not just going out and buying a new Bentley. That only takes money. A hot rod, you've got to create it and then you get to ride around in that thing. It's like rolling art. For me, also, with the motorcycles and the cars, it's adrenaline. It's about going fast. It gives me that rush.

What role does the car play in rockabilly history?
I think it started with the blues, people talking about their new car. Again, it's your personal expression. Especially with the rockabilly music, it goes with the whole lifestyle. Because if you've got the car, you got the guitar and you got the gal — you got the whole package. The only all-car album I can think of is the Beach Boys when they did *Little Deuce Coupe* [*1963*]. That entire album was about cars. I don't know if there's anything like that in rockabilly. But there's enough songs to pick and choose.

What's more impressive, your car collection or your guitar collection?
Here's the thing. I don't have anything I don't use. I don't have wall-hanger guitars or closet guitars. I don't have, certainly, the money or the time for a big car collection. I can pretty much get by with what I work on, and that's my rule of thumb. If I don't play it or I don't ride it, I don't have it.

At O2 Academy Birmingham, England, June 23, 2019. Note the Roland RE-301 Chorus Echo atop his Fender Bassman.

You've said the inspiration for the new single, "Smash Up on Highway One," was Dick Dale.
Yeah, that's true. When the Stray Cats toured in 2019, I was playing "Misirlou." I really liked the Eastern hook of that track. I thought, Man, I'd like to write something like that. So I came up with that crazy lick. I don't know what scale it is, actually. It's a mode, but I don't think it's exact; it probably has a note or two changed. Maybe one of your readers can weigh in on that. The idea was to insert that into my sound, which is the rockabilly base. Then there's "The Cat With 9 Wives." The note in that lick should be an E, but I play an E♭, which I thought was kinda clever. It's kind of a passing tone. That's how you keep the whole thing fresh. You keep inventing things.

"I NEVER NEEDED ANYTHING LIKE AN OVERDRIVE PEDAL. BECAUSE IF I WANTED A LITTLE MORE GAIN, I'D JUST STAND CLOSER TO THE AMP"

Do you think there's a correlation between rockabilly and surf music?
It's interesting you say that. I know a lot of rockabilly

STEVE THORNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

musicians, and they're really influenced by surf music. There does seem to be an overlap in the guitar tone, with the reverb. The Ventures' *Live in Japan '65* — my God, it's fantastic.

How did you get that amazing tone on "Stack My Money"?

Isn't that a good sound? The hardest sound to get, for me, is a strong, clean tone without it breaking up or being plunky. Back in the day, Chet Atkins was always after that. He wanted a clear sustain. We got that tone quite by accident. I used the Deluxe Reverb, an early '60s one — y'know, the blackface with the one speaker. And by accident, we left the vocal mic on. It was way distant, right? I came in and I played, and I was like, "Wow, that's just what I'm looking for." And the engineer said, "Wait, I just gotta turn off the vocal mic." When he turned off the vocal mic, the sound went away. It was like, "Put that vocal mic back on!" And it happened again. So, trial and error.

"I'D GO BACK TO MEMPHIS IN '56. TO BE MAKING THAT MUSIC BACK THEN, IT MUST HAVE BEEN INCREDIBLE"

The arrangement of "The Wrong Side of the Tracks" is really sophisticated.

That ain't rockabilly. That could be a theme song from a '50s rockabilly movie, with the strings and chord changes. But there wouldn't be a blues or rockabilly musician who would have written that. That's more like something you would hear from Elmer Bernstein. I'm not comparing myself to one of those composers, but that's a soundtrack that I made into a rockabilly song. It's got sophisticated chordwork, but I made it fit into my world.

When you think about the architects of rockabilly guitar technique from the '40s and '50s, who do you regard most highly?

For me, there's two guys…and then there's a hundred guys you've never heard of. Let me start with the hundred guys you've never heard of. Because the hundred guys who did a great guitar solo in the '50s, they came out of the hills, or they drove a truck for a living. And they had one song, and they drove to a little studio in Memphis or somewhere, and they made the song, and if it wasn't a hit, they were back driving the truck. And you'd go, "Who was that?" Nobody knows. Like, who played the guitar solo on [*Billy Lee Riley & The Little Green Men's*] "Red Hot"? I know it was Roland Janes. But nobody knows who that is. Nobody really knows who the two popular guys who most affected me are: Scotty Moore and Cliff Gallup. I'm sure if you asked 90 percent of today's guitar players, they might not know those two. But they were the most consistent guys, the two who kept coming up and hitting the ball out of the park.

If you could set the controls of a time machine to any city and scene, where would you go?

I'd go back to Memphis in '56. You have to remember how conservative our societies were back then. To be making that music back then — to be really shaking it up — it must have been incredible.

Why does rockabilly have such an enduring appeal?

Because it comes from the heart. It speaks to you. It's like the blues. But, to me, it's much more exciting than the blues. It's sexy. It has the whole musical package. It has the style. It has pizzazz. It's not about combing your hair a certain way or wearing a certain outfit. It gets something going inside you. And for guitar players, it's the best music you can play. You can do anything with it. You can inject jazz, country, blues into that style.

Do you think rockabilly players need a whole different skill set? Could a rock guitarist play this stuff?

Well, let's just take two generic guys. If you take a generic rocker and tell him to play rockabilly, no. Because the rockabilly players are versed more in fingerpicking, which comes from Chet Atkins, and single-string solos, which come from people like Charlie Christian; they come from jazz. I guarantee you that 99 percent of the rock guys could not play rockabilly. Could it go the other way? Yeah, I think it could. Because rock music is more based on chords, and single-string riffs that are based on a pentatonic scale. So without being a snob, I don't think the rock guys could do the 'billy.

STEVE THORNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

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Nylon-string maestro **Jesse Cook** finds release in electronic beats on *Libre*, his latest fret-burning effort.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT BARNES

JESSE COOK CROSSES over to such a broad audience that he essentially flies over the radar as a guitar player. The French-born Canadian has dazzling chops and deep nylon-string guitar knowledge, yet he momentarily draws a blank when asked what pick he favors because he's more accustomed to being addressed like a singer by the straight press than as a guitar instrumentalist by a player's magazine.

Cook packs theaters with the general public and is more likely to be seen onscreen doing one of his popular PBS specials than on late-night talk show. His YouTube channel has nearly 100,000 subscribers and more than 25 million accumulated views, while his Spotify numbers surpass 55 million and his Pandora streams soar beyond 300 million. Cook's music is flamenco-inspired, but he's not a pure-breed flamenco cat. He's capable of playing classical, jazz and a variety of Latin styles, and his own music is a mixed bag full of all that. Consider his latest release, *Libre* (One World). Inspired by the music his teenage kids listen to — from trap to lo-fi — it finds him fretting over infectious beats created via '80s technology, namely the venerable Roland TR-808 Rhythm Composer.

Libre is a total pandemic record, conjured in Cook's Toronto home studio with myriad overdubs and guests who bring a whole world of fretted instruments to the party. The primary collaborator is Algerian multitasker Fethi Nadjem, who co-wrote the fabulously funky "Hey!" the trippy dark "Onward til Dawn" and the exotic "Oran" while contributing mandole, gumbri, and heavenly violin solos over the album's length.

"Fethi can play practically any musical instrument," Cook attests, "but I consider him a violinist foremost and kind of like an electric lead guitar player, because the violin has a similar ability to create sustained tones."

The guitarist has Nadjem in tow on his highly anticipated Tempest II tour, which finally kicked off in mid January. The stint was originally planned for 2020 to mark the 25th anniversary of his breakthrough debut album, *Tempest*. *Libre* is a return to that early DIY approach, but the deep electronic grooves differentiate the new album from any of Cook's 10 previous studio efforts.

Libre grabbed my attention for being a departure. Are you getting a lot of that sentiment?

So many people have said that, which is funny, because I try to make every record a departure. The first couple were rumba flamenco, and you could hear a lot of my influences, from the Gipsy Kings and Peter Gabriel to the Guitar Trio with John McLaughlin, Paco de Lucia and Al Di Meola. After that, I started trying different things, like recording with musicians in Cairo and Columbia, and in Lafayette, Louisiana, with Buckwheat Zydeco. Maybe this one resonates with a younger crowd because it's infused with the kind of 808 trap beats heard in contemporary music, from reggaeton to K-pop. Since I've never been properly in any one genre, I've always been somewhat envious of players like Paco de Lucia or Vicente Amigo, who come from and then further a rich tradition, such as flamenco. My music is a reflection of my life, which has been a little bit all over the place.

Were you always drawn to the nylon-string?
The short answer is yes. The longer story is that my family bounced back and forth between Europe and Canada. In a weird twist of fate, when my father retired to the south of France, he wound up buying the house next door to Nicholas Reyes, the leader of the Gipsy Kings. In addition to hearing them, I'd hear local kids in the street playing that way. They were treating the guitar as a percussion instrument, and I remember just loving it. That was totally my thing.

Toronto is a very multicultural city, and when I was a young musician there, I studied all sorts of drums and percussion from India, Brazil and West Africa. I also studied at Berklee College of Music, and they didn't want to teach me on nylon, so I got a Les Paul and learned to play jazz and rock music with a pick. But at home I always wrote and played nylon-string, because you can say very different things on such a different instrument. My first lessons were in flamenco, but as I got better, my teachers steered me toward classical. I developed a lot of fingerstyle facility, and playing with fingernails on a steel-string would shred them. I liked the sound of the steel-string, but it wasn't my instrument.

Onstage at Royal Oak Music Theatre, Michigan, January 15, 2019

SCOTT LEGATO/GETTY IMAGES

What nylon insights would you share with all the steel-stringers out there?
There are lots of different kinds of nylon-string players, and the most common misconception is that people envision flamenco as being classical, when in fact flamenco guitars are actually quite different from classical guitars. Classicals have a big, warm round tone, whereas flamenco guitars have a bit of a buzz to them. There's an X factor to a flamenco guitar that's like tobacco or coffee, and an array of different ways to hit the soundboard as you play, called *golpes*. Steel-string players recently started tapping on the guitar, but that kind of pounding on the box has been around in flamenco for hundreds of years in order to compete with the pounding of dancers' feet, hands clapping and people singing at the top of their lungs. The nylon-string gets a bad rap as being a little bit dainty, but it's not — it can be nasty, and I love it. Having a bit wider neck allows more room for your fingers to cover different things simultaneously.

Can you dig deeper into the evolution of flamenco?
Another misconception is when people hear salsa, Latino music; they might think that it's flamenco when it's actually not. Flamenco is originally gypsy music from Andalucia, southern Spain. Keep in mind that the guitar originally comes from Spain. Luthiers there have been making guitars for hundreds of years, and even back then the great luthiers would make classical guitars out of the most expensive woods, like rosewood. Gypsies came along looking for something less expensive, so luthiers

would use cheaper, brighter woods like cypress. They would also make the top much thinner than a classical, and with much lower action. The bridge is rather small, so you can hit the wood of the guitar face with your finger and your nail, while also hitting the string. Do that on a classical and when your nail hits the face wood, the string hits kind of in the middle of the finger and rips the skin off. It's awfully painful. Flamenco is all about being able to pound the instrument to create a rhythm that sounds like a full band.

Over time, people came to like the sound of those cheaper woods, and the luthiers started to refine it. Nowadays a spruce or cypress guitar made by a great Spanish luthier like Reyes costs 20,000 Euros. Negras like what Paco famously played back in the day have the warmer sound of rosewood back and sides. Blancas, or blonds, like the kind Vicente Amigo and I prefer, have spruce or cypress back and sides. In recent years they've gone from being used mostly for rhythm accompaniment to becoming featured concert guitars.

What's your favorite guitar?

My favorite is made by Conde Hermanos, which means "Conde Brothers." Spanish lutherie historically goes back to the Ramírez shop, and you can trace the Conde's lineage back to it in the early 1900s. When I bought my first concert guitar in Spain, there were three different Conde shops all claiming to be the one where Paco de Lucia bought his guitar. [*laughs*] I eventually determined that Conde Hermanos was indeed the one. They have since split up, continuing the tradition of the tree of great guitar makers splintering into further branches, and nowadays everybody's playing the Felipe V [*five*], made by Felipe Conde. My main live performance guitar is one I found at the Guitar Salon in Santa Monica, California. It's a blond with a cutaway, made by German Vasquez Rubio. I use D'Addario EJ46 Pro-Arté strings.

Can you encapsulate your plucking approach?

My right-hand approach is weird because I studied flamenco and classical playing with my fingers, and jazz with a pick. The funny thing is that I think jazzers like it when you play with your fingers, but flamenco people hate it when you play with a pick. [*laughs*] It's like sacrilege. I bounce back and forth, depending on the situation and the song. When I really want to soar over the band onstage, I'll play with a thick Dunlop Americana Round Triangle pick to get that attack with as close to a warm, flesh-and-fingernail sound as I can come, and think of it more like a jazz solo.

I play fingerstyle when the situation is what they call in flamenco a *falseta*, covering the melody and the bass and the chords simultaneously. I play with my fingers the vast majority of the time in the studio. I'm much more likely to use a pick live when there's more improvisation. You can go pretty fast playing single-note scales using a *picado* technique, plucking with the first two fingers. Paco's *picado* was ridiculously fast. I need a pick to get into that extra gear. My earlier records had flashier guitar playing, whereas now I'm more interested in taking people on a journey. When you put on a record, you want to kind of live in it, with room to move around. You don't want to listen to somebody play 64th notes in your living room. When you go to a concert, you want to have your socks knocked off.

"I ALWAYS WROTE AND PLAYED NYLON-STRING, BECAUSE YOU CAN SAY VERY DIFFERENT THINGS ON SUCH A DIFFERENT INSTRUMENT"

The opening cut on Libre, "Number 5," sounds almost like an exercise in not playing flashy.
Yeah, I was trying to take it to a lo-fi place, and I don't mean low fidelity. Lo-fi music has a chilled-out vibe and kind of a jazzy nostalgic sound that often includes creaky samples of old music. The feel is quiet, but very interesting, like Bill Evans. There's an element of reggaeton in the 808 beat behind it, but the guitar has more of a Cuban vibe, like Buena Vista Social Club.

"THE NYLON-STRING GETS A BAD RAP AS BEING A LITTLE BIT DAINTY, BUT IT'S NOT. IT CAN BE NASTY, AND I LOVE IT"

Whether it's a ballad like "Solace" or an up-tempo cut such as "Updraft," it sounds like you start by creating almost a duet with yourself playing rhythm and melody guitar tracks, and then add organic and electronic elements to create divergent soundscapes.
Right, I do build all my songs kind of the same way. I sit in my home studio and play all the parts. I have lots of percussion, drums, basses and synthesizers. I've always loved doing sound design. People think of me as a guitarist, but I actually majored in music synthesis at Berklee. I love synths, and all the sounds and textures you can build up using a computer. I use Apple MainStage in my live rig as well, and so does my second guitarist, Matt Sellick. We have these pretty insane rigs, so we can play synths and pure nylon-string sounds simultaneously.

How does your signal chain flow?
I have RMC [*saddle*] pickups and a microphone inside my guitar running through separate outputs, plus a multi-pin output sending MIDI information to a Roland GI-20 interface.

SCOTT LEGATO/GETTY IMAGES

All three feed into a computer running Apple MainStage. I use that as a mixer to add effects downstream and also trigger whatever I want synthesized, such as, say, a Bollywood string section to run in unison with a lead line. I always find it weird when I see someone playing a guitar and hear something else, but I like it when there's something else behind it, enhancing. I don't like it when acts sequence shows to backing tracks either, so we'll use drum triggers to get the 808 sounds.

What are you looking forward to most about getting back into the live arena?
You take it for granted when you tour all the time, and then when it's suddenly all gone, well, at first it's a release. You don't have to worry about changing your strings or getting your guitar serviced for whatever broke on the last tour, and it's nice to be with family.

But then you miss the magic of playing live music with band members bringing in ideas, rather than having them all bounce around in your own head. I'm looking forward to having that conversation with the audience, where you're making music and sometimes they sing it back to you, or maybe you do it together. You start to forget after two years away, but the concert experience is truly remarkable.

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FRETBOARD MATRIX

An introduction to the highly useful workings of the CAGED System.

BY TOM KOLB

IF YOU'VE EVER perused the web seeking guitar material, chances are you've run across a mysterious fretboard mapping theory called the CAGED System. Maybe you thought, What is this, a wire box that holds a bounty of chord voicings, or maybe a way of playing in solitary confinement? Well, it's no big mystery once you unlock the first key of the cage. Once understood, the CAGED System can be used to connect the fretboard in a network of interlocking and overlapping chord voicings, arpeggios and scales. In this lesson, we'll examine the fundamentals of the CAGED System, how it applies to chords and lining them up along the fretboard, as well as systems for combining shapes for common chord progressions.

BASIC CAGED-SYSTEM CHORD VOICINGS

The CAGED System is founded upon five basic open-position chords: C (C, E, G), A (A, C♯, E), G (G, B, D), E (E, G♯, B) and D (D, F♯, A). (See **Ex. 1**) Well, would you look at that — the names of the chords spell C-A-G-E-D, providing us with an easy-to-remember acronym. But wait — there's much more!

THE HUMAN CAPO

It's possible to move these five open-position chords up the neck to any key. All you need to do is use your fret-hand index finger as a human capo, as you do when forming barre chords. Look at the C chord shape in **Ex. 2**. Notice the unorthodox fret-hand fingering suggestions. As you'll see, this new fingering scheme frees up the index finger to barre across the strings in order to convert the chord into a movable shape. Slide each of your fretting fingers (4, 3 and 2) up one fret and press your index finger across the top-three strings (G, B and high E) at the 1st fret. This transposes the C chord up a half step to C♯ (C♯, E♯, G♯; see Ex. 3). Once you understand this process, it's possible to slide this voicing to any key along the fretboard by simply shifting the entire shape up one or more frets.

Let's tackle the other open-position chords in Ex. 2. The 2-3-4 fingering for the A chord similarly frees up the index finger for barring the top five strings (the A to the high E) to produce the B♭ (B♭, D, F) barre chord shape illustrated in **Ex. 3**. Another common fingering is to

NEIL GODWIN

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instead barre the ring finger across the D, G and B strings.

For the next chord, the G-to-A♭ chord conversion, it's only necessary to barre your index finger across the D, G and B strings. Don't bother trying to barre the finger across all six strings here, as doing so is unnecessary and only makes the grip cumbersome and arduous to form.

The E chord shape transforms into perhaps the most recognizable barre chord of them all, shown as an F chord in Ex. 3. This shape can be difficult to form at first, as it takes a good amount of index-finger pressure to cleanly barre across all six strings. The D-to-D♯ chord conversion may seem a little odd at first, but it doesn't require an index-finger barre. All you need to do here is fret the root note on the D string with the tip of the finger and avoid strumming the low E and A strings.

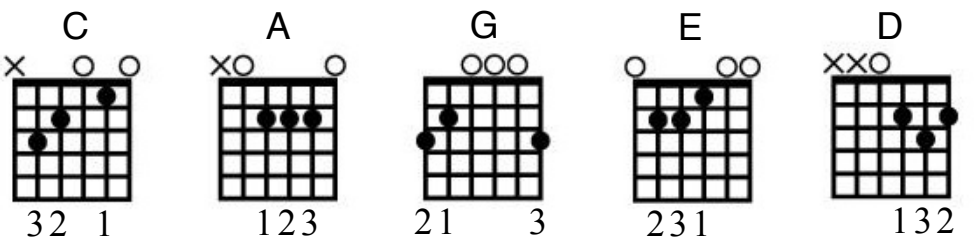
THE FIVE-PATTERN SYSTEM

The chief benefit of the CAGED System is it enables you to connect any chord, scale or arpeggio along the entire fretboard using five patterns. The first step in utilizing the system is to recast the five open-position chords into movable shapes that can be shifted up and down the fretboard to different keys, as we've already done in Examples 2 and 3. Now let's take these movable shapes and apply them to the key of C.

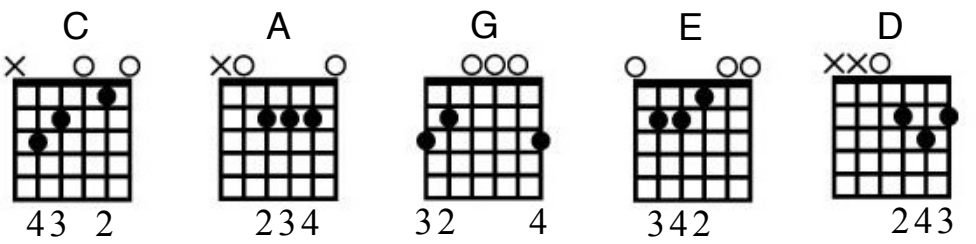
Ex. 4 illustrates this process. Look at the horizontal neck diagram below the chord frames and notice the use of overlaid, overlapping boxes, with every other one having dashed lines. The first box encompasses the open-position C chord, which starts the procession of voicings. The two chord frames above this box represent both the standard open-position C chord and a variation on it that includes a high G note (the 5th of the chord) on the high E string's 3rd fret. The next box (the first one with the dashed lines) houses the movable form of the open A chord shape, transposed to the key of C here, with the low C root note being on the 5th string's 3rd fret).

Moving to the right, the third box hosts the G-shape pattern of a C chord, with the low C root note being moved

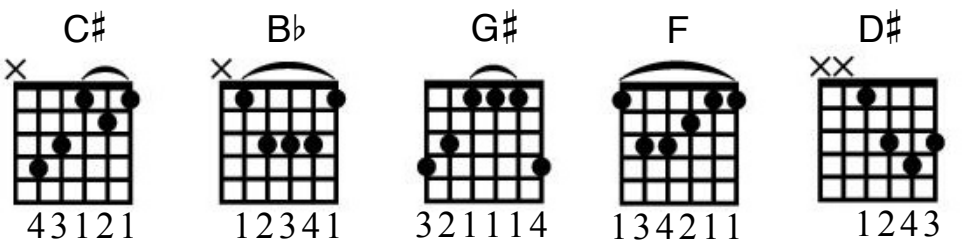
Ex. 1 **Open-position chords**



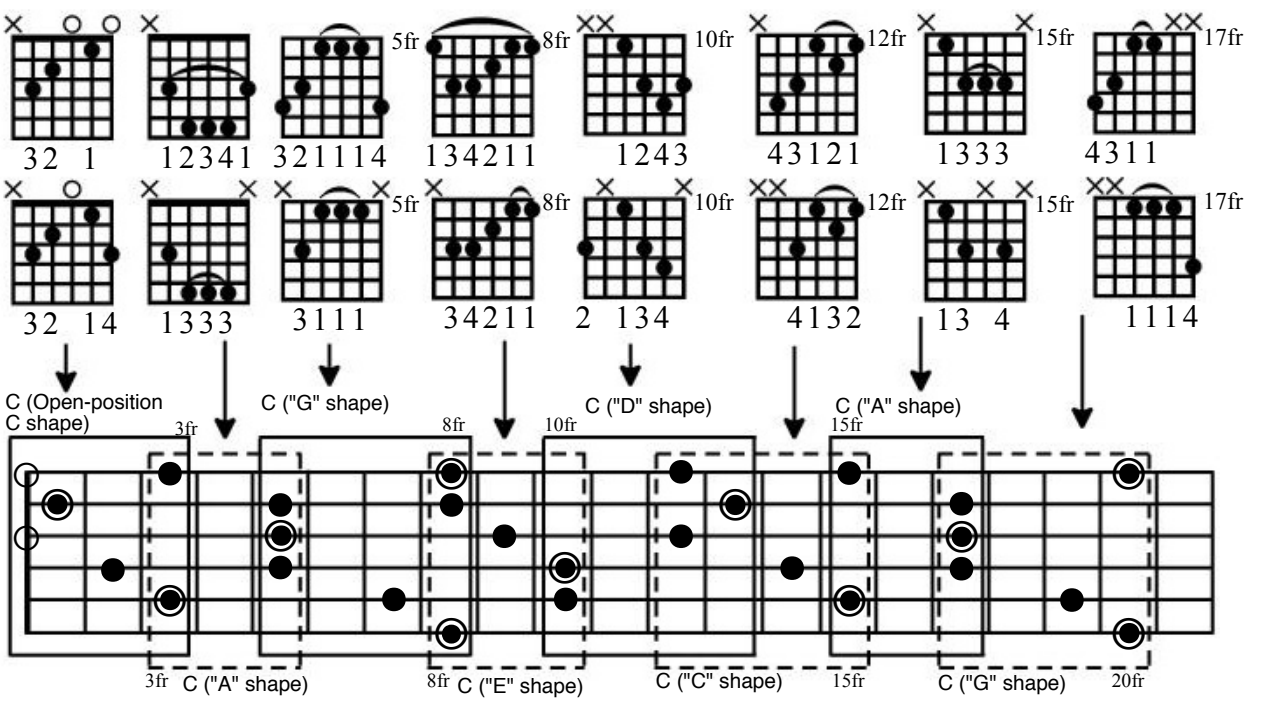
Ex. 2 **Refingering open-position chords**



Ex. 3 **Movable chord voicings**



Ex. 4 **Caged System chords along the neck (key of C)**



up to the 8th fret on the low E string. Box number four (dashed lines again) contains the E-shape voicing of a C chord, with the low C root again being at the 8th fret on the low E string. Box number five frames the D-shape pattern of a C chord, with the C root note now being on the D string's 10th fret. At box number six (dashed lines) we start over again with the C-shape pattern of a C chord, now 12 frets and one octave above the open-position starting point. This is then followed by the A-shape pattern again, and, finally, the G shape.

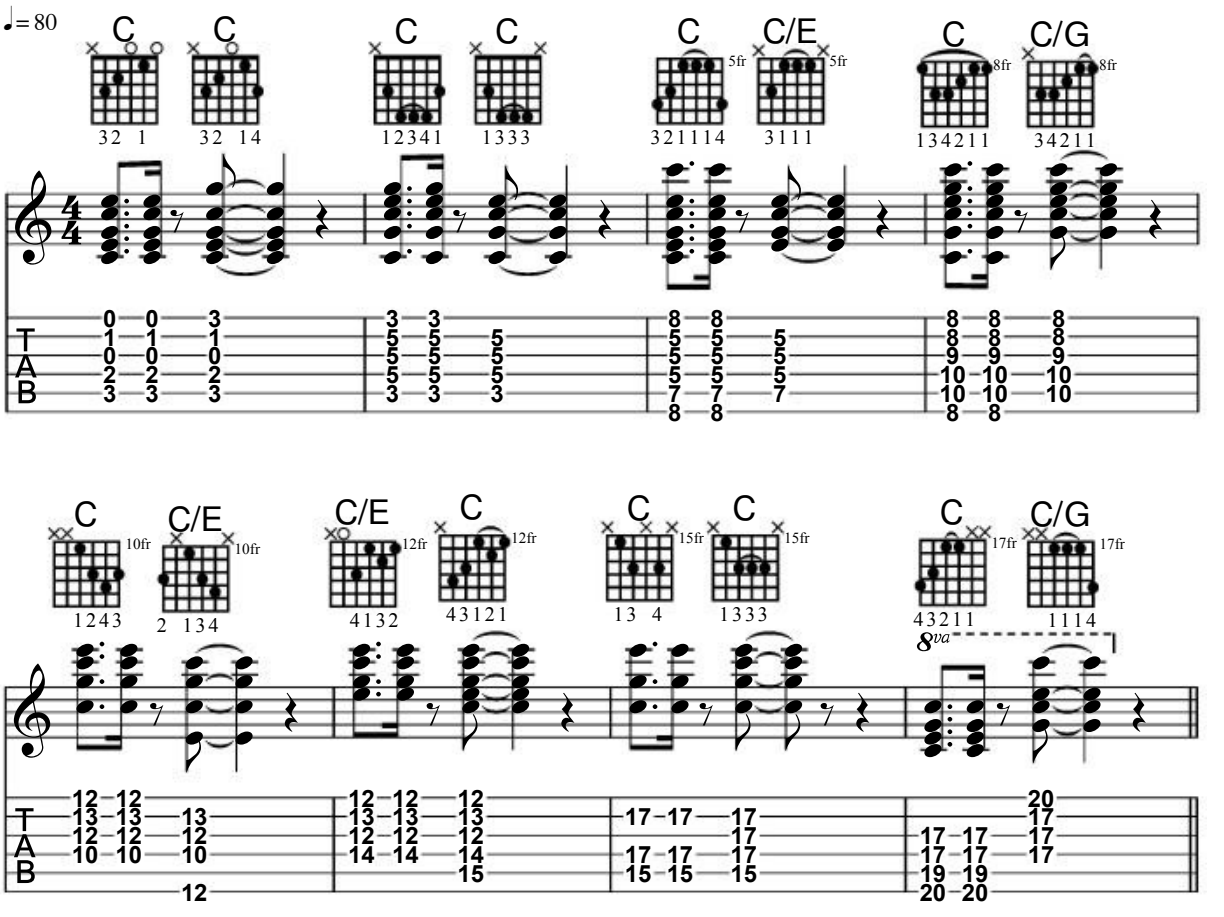
Look back over the boxes and you'll notice the order of chord shapes are C, A, G, E and D, which gives us our CAGED acronym. Also take note of the fact that each chord shape connects to its neighbor by at least one root note. (In some cases, there are several other overlapping chord tones.) The chord frames pictured in the top row above the horizontal neck diagram in Ex. 4 are there to help decipher the chord shapes residing within the boxes on the neck diagram. Of special interest are the second row of chord voicings. These are alternate voicings and inversions of the basic voicings above them.

Ex. 5 is a musical exercise that uses all these voicings in ascending order up the fretboard. Put it together slowly and it should help you to physically understand the connecting potential of the CAGED System.

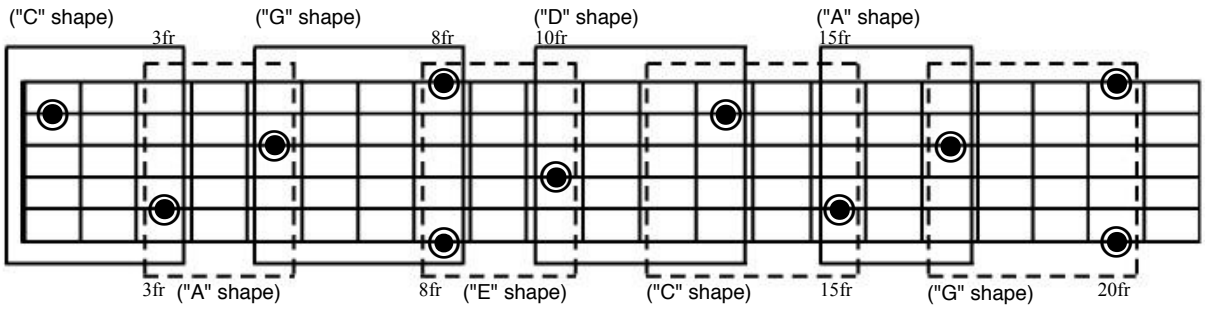
TONIC OCTAVES

The "key" that will unlock the vast potential of the CAGED System lies in the keen awareness of where the roots, or tonic notes, are located within each of the five patterns. Look at the neck diagram in **Ex. 6**, which uses the very same system of overlapping boxes from Ex. 4. Here, all the notes of the C chords are omitted except for the C roots, or tonics. Notice that each box contains at least two notes: a lower C root and its higher octave. The G-shape and E-shape patterns both contain a second octave, with three C notes. It's highly beneficial to commit these octave shapes to visual and finger memory. Here is a system you can use:

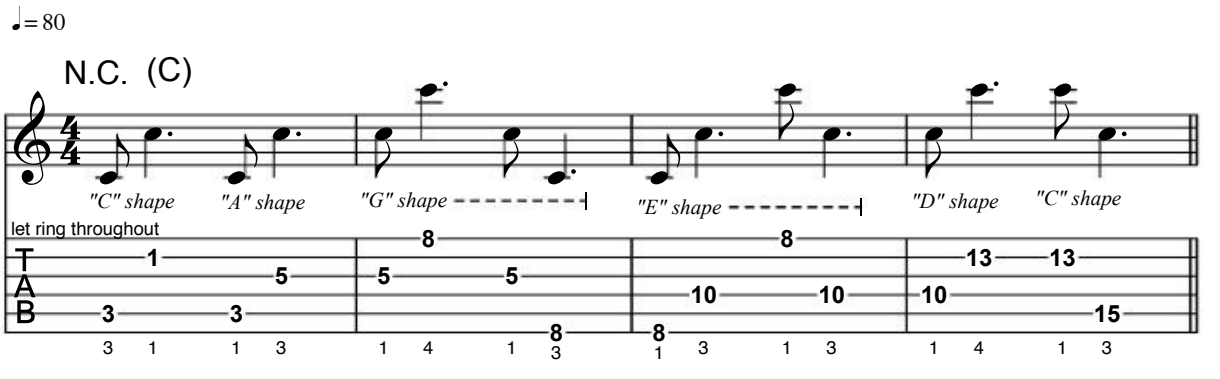
Ex. 5



Ex. 6 **Caged System octave locations (key of C)**



Ex. 7 **Octaves exercise (key of C)**



• C-shape pattern: ring finger on the A string; index on the B string.

• A-shape pattern: index finger on the A string; ring finger on the G string.

• G-shape pattern: ring finger on low E string; index finger on the G string; pinkie on the high E string.

• E-shape pattern: index finger on low E string; ring finger on the D string; index finger on high E string.

• D-shape pattern: index finger on the D string; pinkie on the B string.

Ex. 7 offers a musical exercise that may help to alleviate the tedious nature of the learning process.

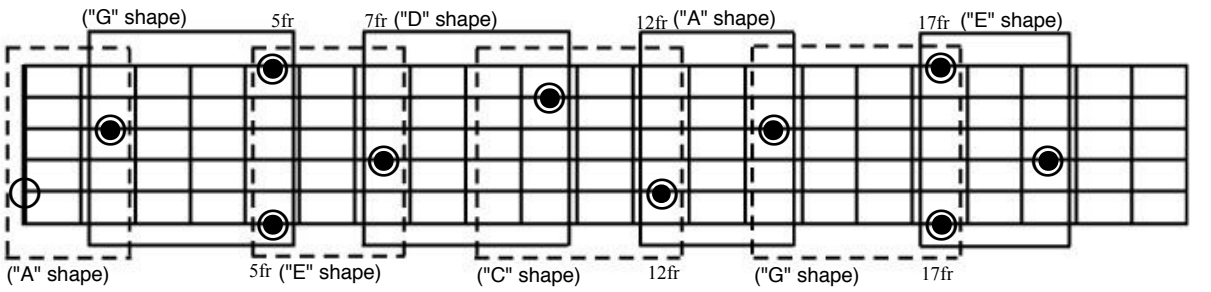
APPLYING THE SYSTEM TO OTHER KEYS

Now that we understand the octave shapes of the CAGED System as applied to the key of C, let's explore some other keys.

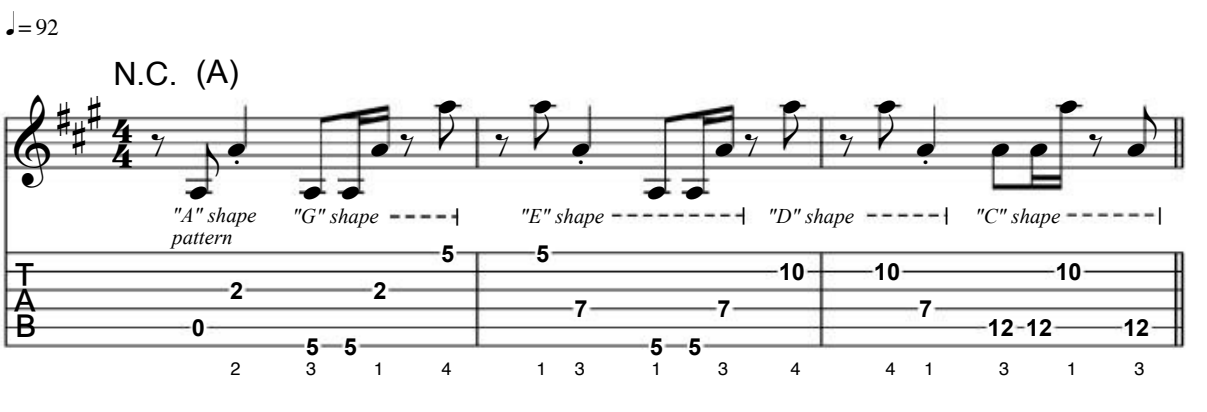
Ex. 8 is a horizontal neck diagram that illustrates the CAGED System octave shapes applied to the key of A. Notice that the octave system begins with the A-shape pattern, in the open position. Next is the G shape, followed by the E shape, D shape and C shape. Then, as happened with Ex. 4, the shapes eventually repeat themselves 12 frets and one octave higher. Notice anything familiar occurring on the fretboard? You guessed it! The order of pattern shapes remains constant. Even though we started with the A shape (second letter of the word *caged*), G came next, then E, D and C to complete the cycle. Again, here's a musical example (**Ex. 9**) to practice the octave shapes, this time in the key of A.

Ex. 10 continues the pattern connecting process, this time in the key of G. Again, notice that the boxes snap together in the same C-A-G-E-D order, but this time starting from the third letter name, G. The musical exercise in **Ex. 11** combines octave practice with corresponding chord shapes.

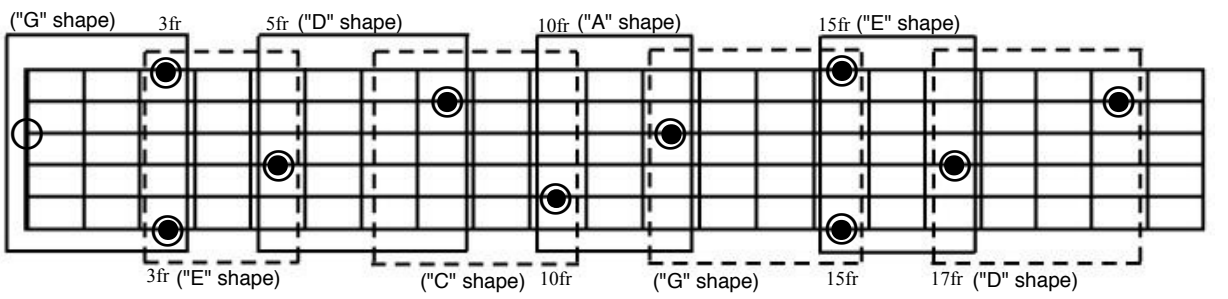
Ex. 8 **Caged System octave locations (key of A)**



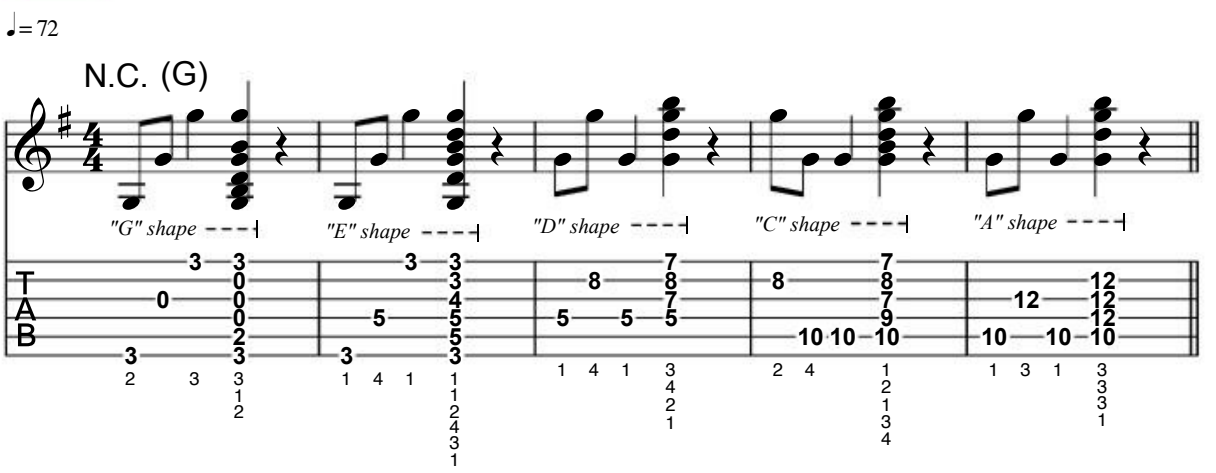
Ex. 9 **Octaves exercise (key of A)**



Ex. 10 **Caged System octave locations (key of G)**



Ex. 11 **Octave exercise (key of G)**



So far, we've covered the keys of C, A and G. Let's continue the survey and hit the two remaining keys — E and D — which, as you know, are important guitar keys! Use **Ex. 12** to guide you through the octave shapes in the key of E in preparation for the hybrid-picking exercise in **Ex. 13**, which has you picking and plucking octave notes together. **Ex. 14** lays out the pattern order for the key of D, while **Ex. 15** offers a 16th-note strumming exercise that will help get you in shape for funky, octave riffing.

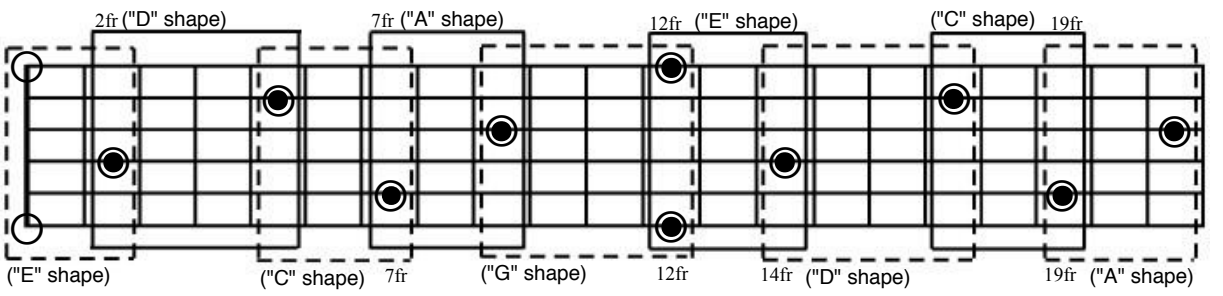
You've no doubt noticed that the five keys we've covered correspond to the five open-position chord voicings from which the CAGED System is derived. The intent was mainly for continuity. It's also possible to apply the five-pattern system to any key (B♭, E♭, F♯, etc.). In fact, I highly advise that you apply the octave shapes to all 12 keys. While you're at it, transpose some or all of the musical exercises presented thus far to other keys as well. Try to make the chord-voicing exercise in Ex. 5 top priority!

CHORD PROGRESSION PRACTICE

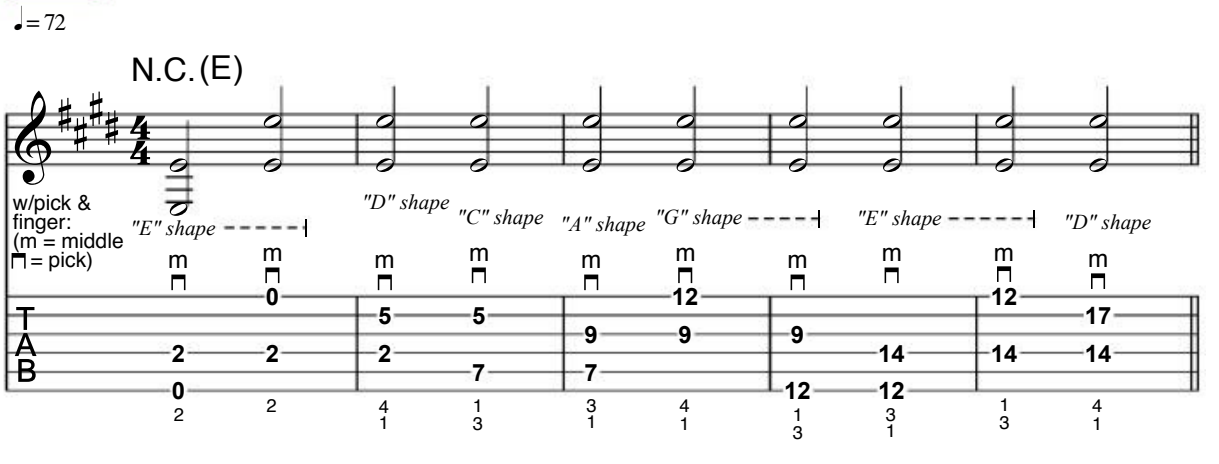
You can start to put the CAGED System to practical use by practicing short chord progressions using shapes derived from the system. One of the most common progressions is the I - IV - V (one - four - five) cadence. (C - F - G in the key of C; E - A - B in the key of E; etc.)

Ex. 16 is a challenging multi-part exercise derived from a one-bar I – IV – V progression in the key of G: G - C - D. Before launching into the example, look at the first chord in each bar. Bar 1 (Ex. 16a) starts with an open-position G chord. Bar 2 (16b) begins with an E-shape pattern of the G chord, which is the next pattern up the fretboard using the CAGED System connecting process. Bar 3 (16c) begins with a D-shape G chord (G/B is a 1st-inversion form of a G chord). Bar 4 (16d) starts with the C-shape form of the G chord, and bar 5 (16e) uses the A-shape form. Finally, bar 6 (16f) utilizes the G shape an octave up from the starting point. This succession of I-chord lineups follows the principles of the CAGED System method, but the

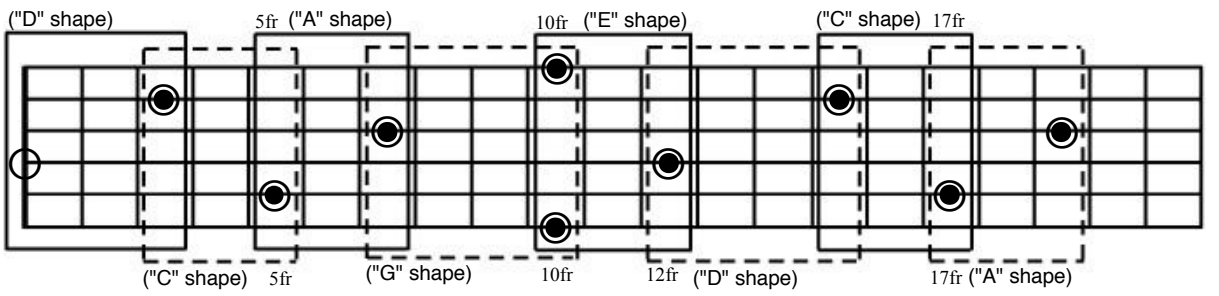
Ex. 12 **Caged System octave locations (key of E)**



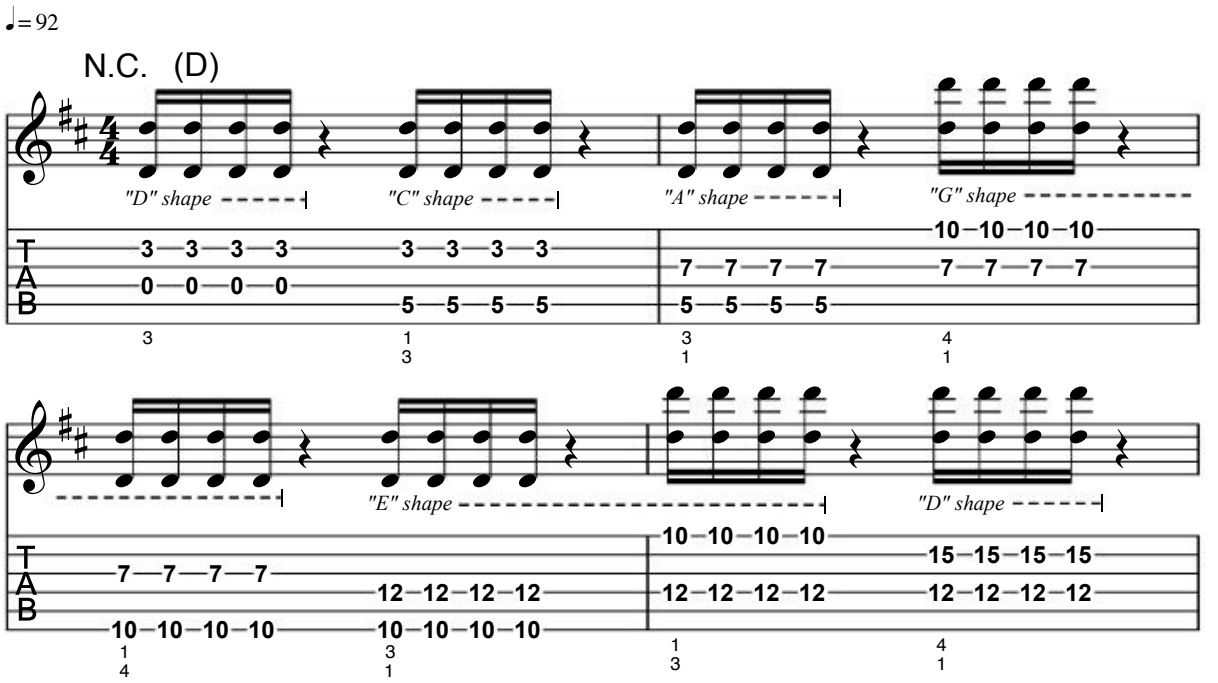
Ex. 13 **Octaves exercise (key of E)**



Ex. 14 **Caged System octave locations (key of D)**



Ex. 15 **Octaves exercise (key of D)**



IV and V chords in each bar correspond to the CAGED System process too. Notice that the C and D chords in each bar are played in the same general area of the fretboard as the initial G chord voicing. That's obvious if you look at the tablature and chord frames. Now follow the order of shapes used to create each C chord voicing, bar by bar — C shape, A shape, G shape, E shape, D shape, C shape. Next, analyze the shape sequence order for the D chords — D shape, C shape, A shape, G shape, E shape, D shape. The CAGED System is fueling the fretboard lineup of not only the I chord but also the IV and V chords!

Don't fret if you're not yet fully grasping all of the concepts brought forth in the previous paragraph. For now, just put this example together and use it as a daily practice routine. Once you have it down, try putting it together in other keys. The connections will sink in, and the payoff will be immense in many aspects, practically guaranteed!

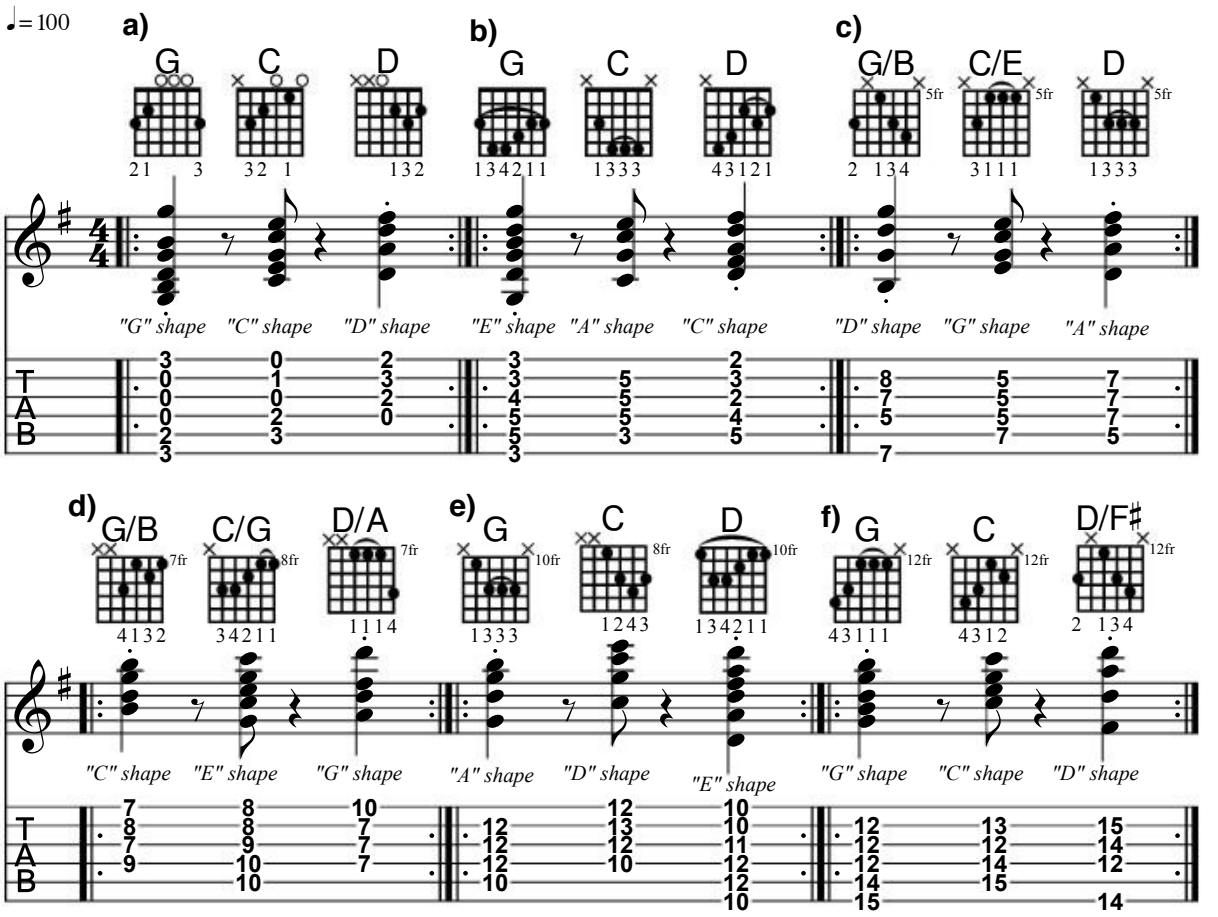
MINOR KEYS

Although the CAGED System's basic principles are based on major chord voicings, the system may also be applied to minor chords. Remember that learning to see all the root-octave locations is the key to harnessing the usefulness of the CAGED System. Now look at the neck diagram in **Ex. 17**. This is the C minor counterpart to the C major diagram from Ex. 4. Whereas Ex. 4 depicted various shapes and voicings for a C major chord (C, E, G), Ex. 17 does the same for Cm (C, E♭, G). All of the roots and 5ths are the same in each of the diagrams; only the 3rds have been changed, from major (E) to minor (E♭).

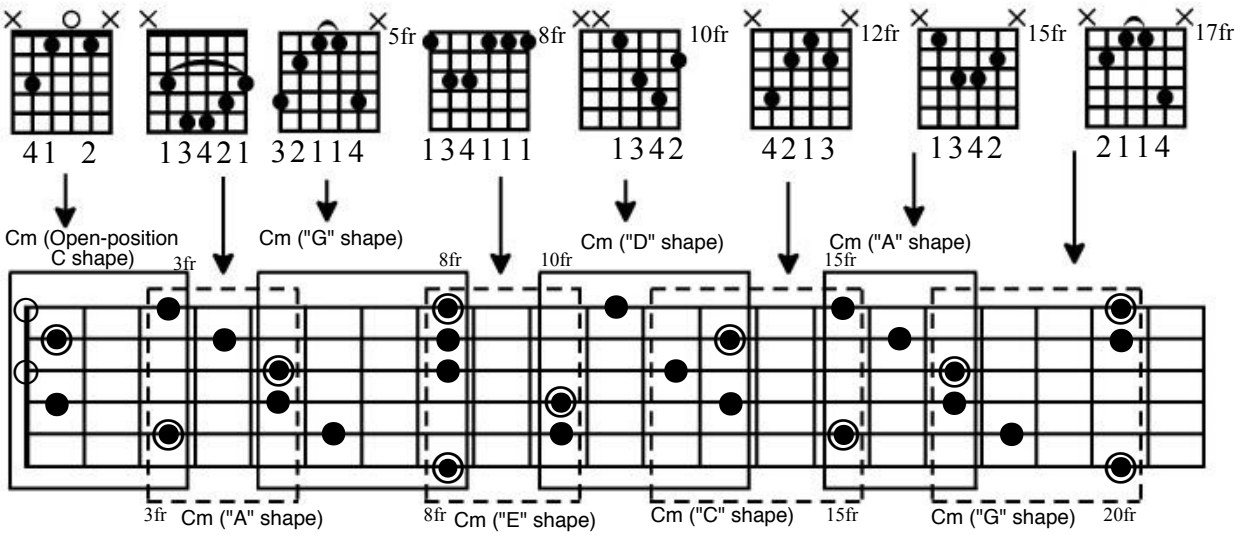
Ex. 18 is a descending musical exercise using several Cm shapes. Inspired by Andy Summers' craftwork in early Police recordings, it ends on a colorful Cm11 (C, E♭, G, B♭, F) voicing.

There you have it! Remember, this lesson serves as merely an introduction to the CAGED System. In a future lesson we will explore how it can be used to connect the fretboard for 7th chords, arpeggios, scales, licks and riffs. Until then, keep practicing!

Ex. 16 **I - IV - V exercise (key of G)**

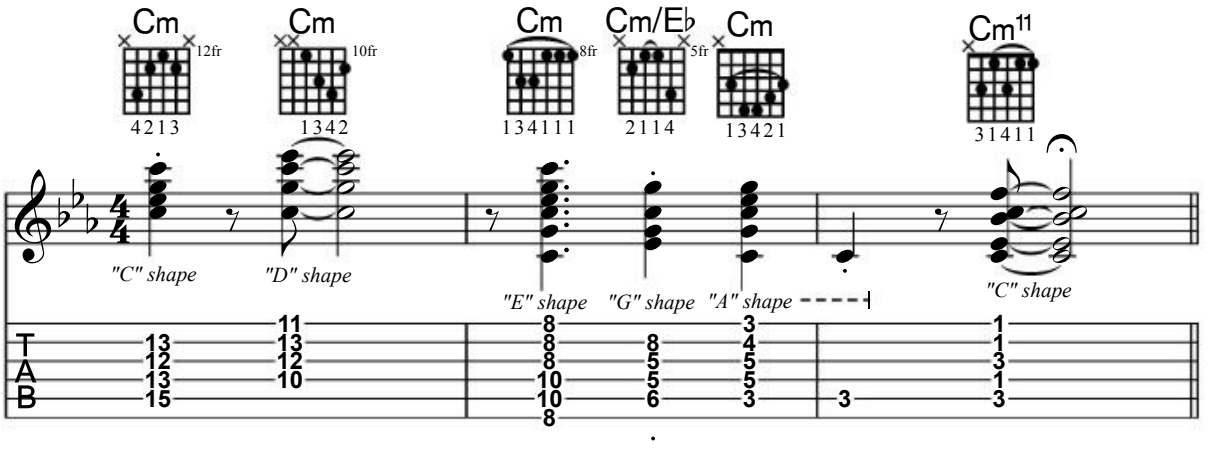


Ex. 17 **Caged System chords along the neck (key of C minor)**



Ex. 18 **Descending exercise (key of C minor) (bridge single-coil pickup with chorus and delay)**

♩= 100



Beat the Odds

Luther Dickinson reveals his technique for fingerpicking with groups of five and seven.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

Luther Dickinson performs with the Southern Soul Assembly in 2014.

"I'VE BEEN OBSESSED with fingerpicking in odd times and odd groupings of five and seven," says North Mississippi Allstars leader Luther Dickinson. While you won't hear much of the guitarist's obsession on the new North Mississippi Allstars album [*see page 54*], it's a big part of the film scoring Dickinson created for the documentary *Onward Christian Soldier*, about American terrorist Eric Robert Rudolph.

As it turns out, Dickinson is deep down this rabbit hole, and he encourages everyone to jump in with him. We'll get a toehold before diving in headlong. To fingerpick fluently, mechanics must be internalized. Slow your roll and concentrate on counting until the flow starts to happen naturally, meaning neural connections have been committed to "muscle memory."

INTERNALIZE FIVE

Says Dickinson, "What really turned me on is how easy it is to do five if you just roll up and back down: thumb, index, middle, index, thumb." This is easily done on any three adjacent strings in any tuning. The main mission is to get a feel for the flow of three digits playing groups of five notes. Counted out, it's simply "1-2-3-4-5." To put it in play, create a chord or put the guitar in an open tuning. Start on the sixth string, and after the first cycle is complete, move to a fifth string root and repeat. Then move to the fourth and the third string. From there, either repeat or work backward down from the third string.

ODD TIMES FOR ODD GROUPS

That basic motif works in 3/4, as "1 2 3 4 5" equals "1 and 2 and 3," only the last note holds for two eighths (i.e., a quarter note). Each of those groups of five plucks, plus the hold, happens over three quarter notes, so it's like six over eight, which boils down to three over four. It helps to set a click and play to that. Commit that to muscle memory, and then try this inversion: Upon completing the first group and jumping to the fifth string root, start the pattern with the middle finger on the third string. Then roll down with index and thumb on strings four and five, respectively, before finger rolling back up. Now try alternating the two finger patterns successively. Once that's happening in 3/4, it's time to connect them.

The next step takes us to Dickinson's level, and it's super hip. Simply keep the whole train rolling with straight eighth notes, and the flow smooths out seamlessly into a cascading cycle. Repeat the alternating patterns successively several times. See how natural it is to connect them? It's as if the two were meant to work together as one whole. We're actually plucking 10 eighth notes per measure, which reduces to 5/4. Set your click to five beats and get it going, then try moving the root up from strings six through three and then back down again, alternating between plucking patterns.

INTERNALIZE SEVEN

You can break groups of seven down into smaller divisions of four and three. Dickinson's method for this involves using four adjacent strings. The first half of the pattern goes: thumb on string six, index on four, thumb on five, middle on three. The second half is: thumb on six, index on four, middle on three. As before, each of the first six plucks lasts the duration of an eighth note, except the very last one, which hangs on for a quarter note, allowing you a moment to reset and keeping the time common at 4/4. Count this as "1 and 2 and 3 and 4."

Next level Again, simply keep the whole thing going, letting it roll over with no quarter note at the end. The time signature end up as 7/8, and we wind up with another very natural cyclical flow. Count is as "1 2 3 4, 1 2 3." This also works well across the strings moving the root up from the sixth to the fifth and fourth, and then back down each again.

Highest level Dickinson is fully into the cyclical flow, and to take the challenge even higher he says, "Another way I like to count these is over 4/4. I love feeling where the five- or seven-pattern turns over, making different beats the first of the phrase. Tapping my feet back and forth helps me feel the long pattern of how many cycles before the downbeat falls back on the one where I started. It helps me to internalize, reacquaint myself with each eighth note, and feel the pulse of five or seven on top of four."

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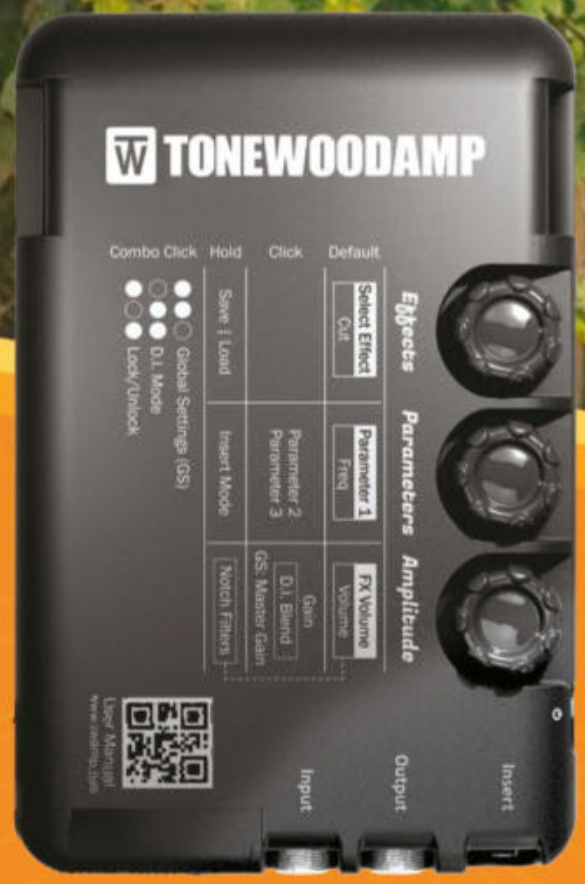

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VERTEX EFFECTS
STEEL STRING SUPREME SRV PREAMP

If you love the Dumble-derived tones of Stevie Ray Vaughan, Eric Johnson or John Mayer, the Steel String Supreme SRV preamp pedal should be on your list. Designed to function as a preamp, it inherits the level, gain, filter and jazz/rock controls from the Vertex Steel String MkII, and goes even further. The output knob determines your first gain-stage level, and fat shapes the lower midrange for extra thickness and body. Clean offers a parallel blend of your clean and effected signal, and the three-way Bright/Deep mode switch delivers a treble boost in the up position, a bass boost in the down position, and is neutral in the middle.
$249. vertexeffects.com

BOSS
FZ-1W WAZA CRAFT FUZZ

Boss analyzed several vintage fuzz circuits and the sounds of the Tone Bender MK I and MK II to create the FZ-1W, a pedal that puts Waza craftsmanship and premium components to work in a classic-sounding fuzz. The FZ-1W has controls for level, fuzz and tone, plus a Vintage/Modern mode switch that selects between the aggressive tone, dynamic touch response and extreme sensitivity to input volume of classic fuzz units and the fatter and more mid-focused tones associated with contemporary music styles. The tone control is designed for deep sculpting, allowing you to get the most out of both modes and making the FZ-1W a wonderfully versatile device for fuzz lovers.
$199. boss.info

TC ELECTRONIC
ZEUS DRIVE OVERDRIVE

The all-analog Zeus pedal delivers thunderous overdrive, giving your guitar signal a boost without affecting its dynamic range. The result is thick, warm distortion, with an outstanding dynamic response. The drive control progressively blends overdrive with a buffered clean signal to deliver transparent, amp-like tone and response. The Zeus pedal forgoes the standard tone control for a treble attenuator that lets you dial in your highs without thinning the lower frequencies. Better still, engaging the Fat switch induces luxuriously warm and enveloping bottom end. TC Electronic stepped up the Zeus's internal voltage, giving it a huge dynamic range and output power via the volume control. An internal DIP switch toggles true bypass and discrete buffered bypass, allowing you to choose the option that's best for your setup. **$69. tcelectronic.com**

BLACKSTAR
DEPT. 10 DUAL DRIVE, DUAL DISTORTION AND BOOST

Blackstar's new Dept. 10 Series Dual Drive and Dual Distortion pedals both pack an ECC83 (12AX7) tube and have been designed to run at amp-level internal voltages to really get those lightbulbs cooking. But there's a digital twist in the form of Blackstar's new Cab Rig emulation, which, combined with the new Architect software, gives you deep, flexible editing of a virtual cabinet, including choice of speaker and mic, placement and EQ, making it a portable, valve-powered solution for live and recording applications. Both pedals feature regular and dedicated emulated outputs, three-band EQ, Blackstar's ISF control, an effects loop, and USB for use as an audio interface.

Blackstar's new series also includes the Dept. 10 Boost, which sets itself apart from the Dual pedals by being aimed at a more traditional pedalboard setup. You won't find any digital wizardry here. Instead, this pedal aims to give your board a bump that Blackstar says is akin to adding two hot gain stages to your chain. The Peter Baxandall–style EQ circuit is known for its smooth, wide-sweeping tonality and delivers rich second-order harmonics and natural compression. **Dual Drive, $299. Dual Distortion, $299. Boost, $219. blackstaramps.com**

WALRUS AUDIO
ERAS FIVE-STATE DISTORTION AND IRON HORSE LM308 DISTORTION

Walrus Audio's two new distortion pedals provide varying flavors of the effect via clipping from silicon diodes, LEDs or both together. However, each takes a different route to dialing it in.

The Eras Five-State Distortion has five hard-clipping options, gain and volume knobs, and very effective tone controls — the treble knob is especially adept at dialng in cutting presence. There's a great variety of dirt on offer, from crunchy drive to high-gain metal tones, and all the clipping modes have something different to offer. The main delineation is between the three Tight modes and the two Rhythm modes, where the scooped mids offer a notably different sonic landscape to the Tight modes' slight mid cut. The cherry on the top is the blend knob, which allows you to mix your dry sound with the distortion for hybrid layered sounds or, more subtly, extra clarity and definition as you roll it back from fully wet.

The Iron Horse LM308 Distortion is the third iteration of the Iron Horse pedal, and it's had quite a revamp over its predecessors. There's now more pedalboard-friendly positioning of the I/Os and a soft-relay true bypass on/off. Significantly, the new version allows continuous morphing from silicon diode to LED clipping. The Iron Horse LM308 Distortion offers distortion based around a LM308 chip as found in a Pro Co Rat, and the sonic similarities are immediately apparent. The tone knob even has that same huge range rolling back from fully bright to dark and woofy. The gain range is very versatile, taking you from a tonally targeted clean boost right through to full-on distortion. **Eras Five-State Distortion, Iron Horse LM308 Distortion, $199 each. walrusaudio.com**

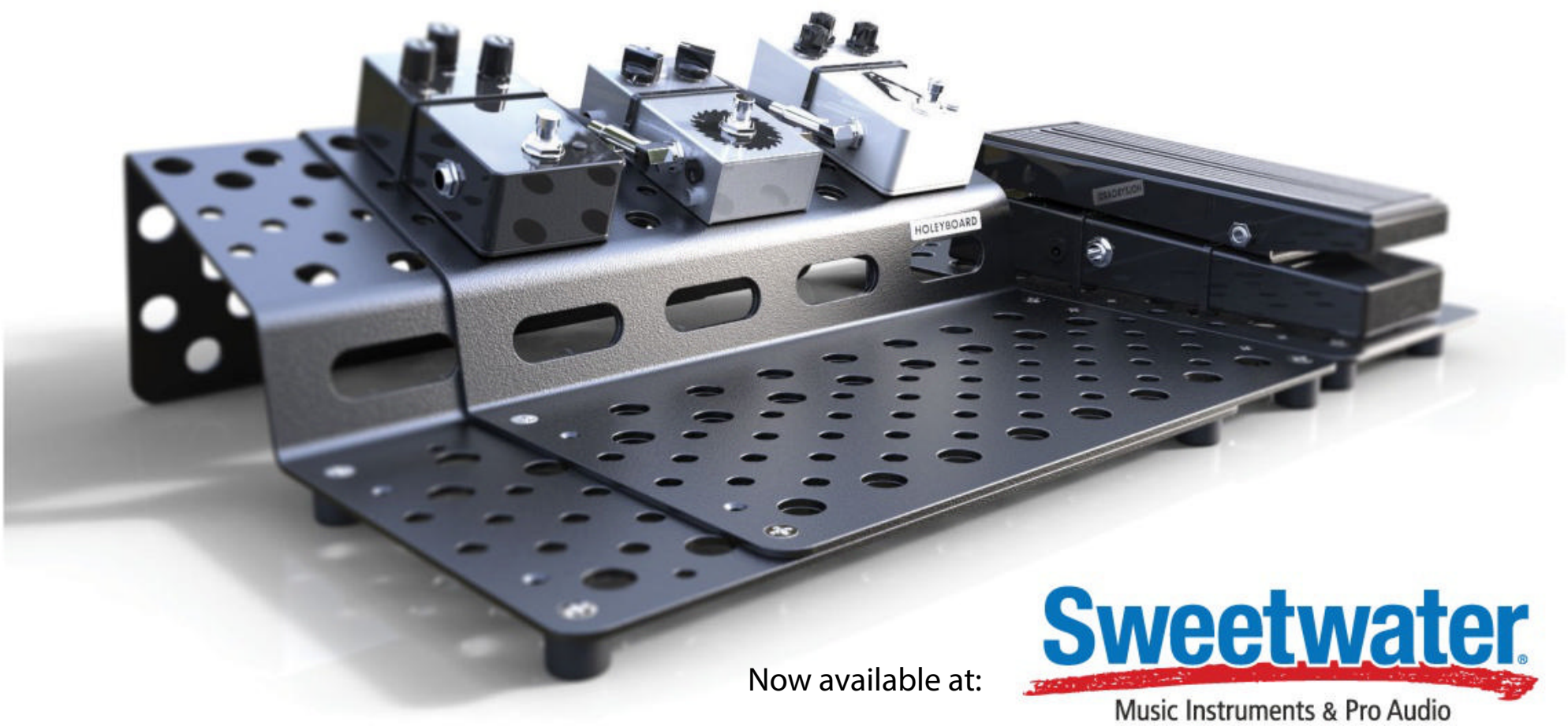
JHS
PACKRAT DISTORTION

JHS founder Josh Scott examined 45 versions of famous Rat stompbox and authentically reproduced their circuits, accounting for drift from the aging components. The result is the PackRat, a pedal that offers nine vintage and hard-to-find replications — not emulations — of the iconic Rat distortion pedal. The PackRat uses a proprietary digital runway system to direct the paths of 261 components through 40 individual switches, giving you the exact same circuitry as the original pedals in a purely analog signal path. **$249. jhspedals.info**

WAMPLER
PANTHEON DUAL OVERDRIVE DELUXE

The Wampler Pantheon's interpretation of a "Blues Breaker" stomp box captured all the tonal nuance of the original, but with added flexibility and style. The new Pantheon Deluxe lets you dial in two channels of organic creamy gain, gritty overdrive or heavy distortion. Channel 1 delivers a classic Blues Breaker tone, while Channel 2 is a recreation of the original Pantheon, a similar circuit to the Blues Breaker but with a modern boutique feel. Independent side-mounted voicing and gain level switches allow you to further shape your tone to perfection. The Dual Pantheon offers a staggering 200 combinations of gain settings, features dual inputs and outputs, and — a first for Wampler — includes MIDI channel switching. **$269. wamplerpedals.com**

Holeyboard®



Now available at: Sweetwater Music Instruments & Pro Audio

PRS

SE Silver Sky

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

RELEASED IN THE arms of superstar John Mayer in 2018, the original Silver Sky model from Paul Reed Smith made a big splash and raised some eyebrows in the process. The notion of this storied maker undertaking an idealized rendition of the time-honored Stratocaster drew gasps from some quarters, but those who played the thing almost universally praised its clever and archetypal PRS-like reworking of the form, and the superb playability, tone and efficiency of the effort.

With that in mind, the new SE Silver Sky is set to make big waves of its own. Likewise released with Mayer's full approval, and with a string of launch events to prove it, the model brings PRS's creative take on the 25.5-inch-scale, bolt-neck, three-pickup classic to the world of hard-working guitarists at a much more accessible price, while maintaining the style, features and design in the way that has long made the offshore-built SE line a big success.

This guitar isn't cut straight from traditional cloth, as various design points make evident. Stand-outs include the three-to-a-side PRS headstock, and visual queues such as the diving-bird inlays on the 22-fret rosewood fingerboard. A closer look also reveals the distinctive bevel given to the inside of the lower cutaway and the rounded neck heel, both complementing the traditional, comfort-enhancing ribcage and forearm contours by aiding playability at the upper frets.

Rather than use ash or alder, as found on Strats of the '50s and '60s, the SE Silver Sky has a body of poplar, which was used for models like the Mustang and Duo-Sonic II. Our review sample is finished in Dragon Fruit, a luscious deep-pink-meets-purple gloss that comes alongside Ever Green, Moon White and Stone Blue in the new SE lineup. Together with the three-ply white pickguard, white pickup covers and knobs, and light-gray tuner buttons and truss-rod cover, it makes for a stylish look that's both familiar and subtly modernized.

Beneath that aforementioned fretboard, the neck is made from maple, with a scarfed joint for the gently back-angled headstock and a four-bolt joint to the body. PRS calls its profile the 635JM shape, an easy-to-like rounded "C" that measures .828 inches deep at the first fret and .968 inches at the 12th. The frets are smooth and well dressed, something we've

SPECIFICATIONS

SE Silver Sky
CONTACT prsguitars.com
PRICE $849 street

NUT Synthetic bone, 1 5/8" wide
NECK Maple
FRETBOARD Rosewood, , 25.5" scale, 8.5" radius
FRETS 22 medium-jumbo
TUNERS Vintage-style, non-locking
BODY Solid poplar
BRIDGE Two-point steel tremolo with vintage-style, bent-steel saddles
PICKUPS Three PRS 635JM "S" single-coils
CONTROLS Master volume and two tone controls, five-way blade switch
FACTORY STRINGS PRS Classic .010–.046
WEIGHT 7.75 lbs
BUILT Indonesia

KUDOS A well-built and cleverly executed reconceived S-type that delivers a lot of tone and playability in its price range
CONCERNS Some players might enjoy an overwound bridge pickup to give more punch to that position

The headstock is gently backangled and features vintage-style, non-locking tuners.

The single-coil pickups are PRS's 635JM "S" units, with a RWRP middle pickup.

A rounded neck heel complements the comfort-enhancing ribcage contour.

come to expect from the Cor-Tek-made SE line, and the guitar plays easily and inspiringly in all positions, which is something we've come to expect from PRS in general.

In the electronics department, the SE Silver Sky sports exactly what you'd expect from a contemporary, though vintage-inspired, S-type. The three single-coil pickups are PRS's 635JM "S" units, made to the same specs as those on the standard Silver Sky, with a RWRP middle pickup for hum-canceling in the two and four settings. They're wired to a five-way blade switch with master volume and two tone controls (the lower for the bridge alone, the upper shared by the middle and neck).

Add it all up, and everything about the SE Silver Sky inspires confidence — the design, the build quality, the playability and, as we shall see, the tone. The neck is both fast and comfortable and should present very few obstacles for fans of any particular or peculiar profile. Ultimately, this is a guitar that's easy to sink into and run with. PRS sets up the two-point vibrato bridge so that the back edge of the base is in contact with the body of the guitar, as is the artist's preference, allowing for down-bend only. They have published instructions online for setting it to float parallel to the body, enabling a more even up-and-down vibrato action, should you desire. I adjusted it to the latter position, and it yielded an easy yet firm action and good return-to-pitch capabilities.

I tested the SE Silver Sky into a Friedman Mini Dirty Shirley combo and a blackface Fender Bassman head and 2x12 cab, using a selection of pedals in front. The short answer — and no surprises here — is that it does anything you'd hope to get from a good S-type, yet it does so with more ease and aplomb than you're likely to get from many straight-out copies or reissues of the breed at this price point. The poplar body delivers similar voicings that I'd expect to hear from an alder-bodied Strat with a maple neck and rosewood fingerboard, and the archetypal glassy shimmer, snap and quack are all part of these pickups' sonic arsenal. There's also more girth underpinning much of it than many traditional S-types deliver, however, with good meatiness behind each pickup position when you dig in, and an impressive avoidance of ice-pick highs.

The pickups are all wound to the same spec of around 7 k-ohms, which leans toward the beefy side for traditional single-coils of this type. It also means they're a little fuller sounding in the middle and neck positions, although the overall balance is decent in this regard, and the bridge position delivers enough grunt for anything from thick twang riffs to snarling rock and roll. Tone-wise, I was most impressed by the appealing blend of harmonic sparkle, wiry bite and gutsy punch from a guitar well into the sub-$1,000 zone. That achievement firmly plants it at the center of bolt-neck SSS model's traditionally broad range of capabilities, which in itself means the SE Silver Sky can really do just about anything you set your mind, heart and fingers to. At this price, and given its versatility, overall build quality and the execution of the "alternative-S-type" concept in general, the PRS SE Silver Sky easily earns an Editors' Pick Award.

ORIGIN EFFECTS

RevivalDRIVE Compact and MAGMA57

TESTED BY JAMES VOLPE ROTONDI

The RevivalDRIVE Compact is a simpler and smaller take on the company's original channel-switching RevivalDRIVE.

WHEN TONE LORDS like David Gilmour, David Grissom and Sonny Landreth top your list of prominent pedal users, it's fair to say you're making a pretty decent product. Founded in 2012 by Simon Keats, U.K.-based Origin Effects has developed a sterling reputation in the past several years among discriminating players for the vintage-approved sonics and all-analog signal paths of flagship pedals like the Cali76 and the much-loved RevivalDRIVE, arguably one of the finest, and surely among the most expensive, front-end overdrive/amp pedals currently available.

Sure, Origin Effects like RevivalDRIVE and Cali76 are pricey by comparison to more mass-produced pedals, but they're also not your garden-variety stompboxes. You won't find any Klon clones, faux Screamers or demi DS-1s in their lineup. Instead, Origin has created a new class of overdrive pedal that mirrors each step in a Class A/B tube amplifier's signal chain, while focusing their customer base on professional players who know that investing in nuanced tone controls, premium components and roadworthy housings is a wise and worthy investment.

Following in the footsteps of the RevivalDRIVE and Cali76 are two of the company's latest offerings: the RevivalDRIVE Compact — a simplified and downsized, if no less impressive, version of the original channel-switching RevivalDRIVE — and the MAGMA57, a stompbox take on the coveted pitch vibrato-equipped late-'50s Magnatone amplifiers.

SPECIFICATIONS

RevivalDRIVE Compact
CONTACT origineffects.com
PRICE $390

CONTROLS Output, highs, gain, blend, lows, presence
SWITCHES Post drive EQ, P/Amp, EQ1, EQ2
HOUSING Hand-polished, brushed stainless-steel, aluminum controls. Neutrik jacks
EXTRAS 9V DC 2.1mm center-negative power supply (no battery option)
SIZE 5.62" x 2.6" x 2.56"
WEIGHT 1.37 lbs

KUDOS Delivers sultry, saggy and versatile amp saturation. Glorious tones from fat crunch to searing leads
CONCERNS High price may deter some players

RevivalDRIVE Compact

While the sophisticated feature set of the original dual-channel RevivalDRIVE appealed to many players, the 12 control knobs and large form factor — and the real estate it required on your pedalboard — did not. With its single-channel circuit, the Compact pares down the knobs into a more manageable set of six. Across the top are controls for output, highs and drive; below are controls for blend (allowing you to mix the wet/dry signal between the pedal and your amp), lows, and More/Pres, which in this case is a bit more nuanced than the presence control on a traditional amplifier. What the Compact retains is the tube-amp-style signal path: a dedicated Class A preamp, a long-tail pair phase-inverter and a "reactive overdrive" design that Origin claims simulates the interaction of amp and speaker.

Like most Origin Effects pedals, the Compact also features a post-drive EQ switch to tailor the sound to the amp you're using: EQ1 is designed for use with brighter amps, EQ2 for darker amps, and P/Amp for use with flat-response modelers and direct recording use, though all may be useful for tweaking the EQ in various settings depending on how you've set the other main controls. In particular, the lows, highs and presence controls will determine EQ shape and the type of amps the pedal is approximating, be they Vox-, Marshall- or more Fender-style tones. If you favor rounder, browner sounds, you may find that EQ1 is your go-to for most amps. EQ2 can be pretty brash unless you're using an especially dark-sounding amp.

While its best reference points may be overdrive pedals from the Fulltone OCD to the Boss Blues Driver and Bogner LaGrange, it's worth noting that the sound from the RevivalDRIVE Compact lives in a sonic space virtually indistinguishable from what a true tube preamp and power amp section would produce. That is, the gain, which is easily variable from Keef-like crunch to EJ-style violin shred and beyond, sounds intrinsic to

PHIL BARKER

the sound you're getting, and not simply layered on top of it.

This impression is justified, in part, by the Compact's excellent blend control, essentially a wet/dry knob. Full-up, it's all RevivalDRIVE (slaying lead tones for days), and as you back off, the Compact reduces its gain and blends with your amp's own gain level to produce a robust, articulate rhythm sound. But rarely do you sense that the sound comes only from the pedal. It just sounds like a great amp doing its job the old-fashioned way, even if your amp has precious little onboard gain of its own.

MAGMA57

While connoisseurs like Billy Gibbons have been touting the charms of late-'50s Magnatone amps for years, most players will have little experience with these beasts, and that's a shame. While they're often compared to Fender Deluxes, Magnatone preamps have a slightly more compact low-end, mellower mids, and add a semi-active, semi-passive tone control, while still retaining that horn-like top and open, detailed character when pushed hard.

A number of Magnatones, including the Custom 260 and 280, also featured true pitch-bending vibrato, a different animal entirely from the volume-modulating tremolo

The MAGMA57 conjures up the tone stack and pitch-bending vibrato found in several Magnatone amps.

in Fender amps. What Origin have sought to re-create in the superbly voiced MAGMA57 is the preamp/power section from the dual-6V6 Magnatone Model 213 Troubador and the pitch-vibrato section from the Model 260 and 280. So good, in fact, is the MAGMA57's tone stack that you might be tempted to buy it even if it didn't feature the remarkably good vintage-quality vibrato circuit. Three smaller knobs for output, tone and drive offer a terrific range of sounds, from bone-clean jazz timbres to big, surfy-smooth-but-driving cleans, to the kind of deliciously ragged and authentic old-school Muscle Shoals or Chess Records overdrive tones you thought might be lost to time. That goes for virtually every position along the drive control's throw. That said, this is not the pedal you want for over-the-top modern saturation. It doesn't do that, and it doesn't need to. This is a very grown-up pedal for players who want authentic lower-gain tones with the accent on character and articulation.

Just as one might be tempted to buy the Magma even without the vibrato circuit, you'd be equally tempted to buy it even without the gorgeous tone stack, so good is the quality, "realness," and expressive range of the vibrato on display here. The speed and intensity controls speak for themselves, and while not decidedly different from the roles they take on other modulation pedals, the three-position blend switch (effectively a phase switch) is a superb innovation. Switched to the top position, 0 (degrees), the two-stage vibrato is blended in-phase with the dry signal, producing one of the most convincing and thick Uni-Vibe-style sounds we've heard, dripping with Hendrix-ian glory.

Flipped down to the 180 (degree) position, the vibrato is summed out-of-phase, generating both phasing and amplitude modulation. It's the kind of greasy chorus you might associate more with Kurt Cobain than Jimi Hendrix. The center position is the stock Magnatone vibrato setting. It's wet signal only, but sounds slightly chorusy and, to my ears, like the modulation circuit on an Electro-Harmonix Memory Man. You can vary it by bringing up the Multi/Speed switch to the X3 position, creating the kind of fast, organ-like churn you'd get out of a very rapidly rotating Leslie speaker, throwing you into Jimmy Smith and John Patton organ-trio territory.

The simple fact that this range of rich, premium modulation sounds is available on one pedal, which also includes a stunning take on the Magnatone Troubador — a rare missing link in amp history — speaks for itself. The RevivalDRIVE Compact offers a similarly pro-tier experience, the kind of wicked but refined overdrive that only rarefied players have boasted on their boards until now. Pedals that cost more than many amps are not going to be on everyone's dance card, but for those willing to make the investment, the returns will be prodigious.

SPECIFICATIONS

MAGMA57

CONTACT origineffects.com
PRICE $459

CONTROLS Output, tone, drive, intensity, speed
SWITCHES Blend (phase), multi (speed range), post drive EQ, P/Amp, EQ1, EQ2
HOUSING Hand-polished, brushed stainless steel; aluminum controls. Neutrik jacks
EXTRAS 9V DC 2.1mm center-negative power supply (no battery compartment)
SIZE 5.62" x 2.6" x 2.56"
WEIGHT 1.98 lbs

KUDOS A bullet-proof live pedal, and perhaps the finest combo of true pitch-modulation and premium low-gain amp tones we've ever heard
CONCERNS High price may deter some players

MUSIC MAN

Dustin Kensrue StingRay

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

DESIGNED IN COLLABORATION with Dustin Kensrue, Thrice's heavy-hitting guitarist and singer, this latest variant in the revamped StingRay series has several notable features, including being tuned D to D to deliver the gutsy crunch that Kensrue often deploys. Along with a stealthy, push-button pickup-wiring scheme, it adds up to a unique Artist model in the MM line.

Arriving with a semi-transparent TV Blond satin-polyurethane finish (Dark Satin Tobacco Burst is also available), our review guitar has a double-cutaway body of African okoume, with rounded curves, and it looks sweet with the black-white-black pickguard, chromed control plate, and a hardware complement consisting of a Music Man Modern tremolo with bent-steel saddles and a push-in bar. Strings are pulled to pitch via a set of Schaller M6-IND locking tuners in a four-plus-two arrangement on the compact headstock that eliminates the need for a string tree.

The comfortable C-shape neck runs from 1 ⅝ inches wide at the nut to 2 ¼ inches at the last fret, and is an easy reach there thanks to the sculpted heel. Riding atop is a rosewood fingerboard with white position dots and 22 medium-wide stainless-steel frets that are mirror polished and worked with a jeweler's precision. You can hardly detect the tips when sliding along the fretboard, and the white synthetic nut is also polished and perfectly fitted and rounded, so there's nothing to jab your hand when you're riffing around in the open position.

A spot-on factory setup brings everything into focus. The intonation is solid and tuneful, and the low action makes for a playing experience that's about as satisfying as it gets. The trem also feels light and responsive, and has excellent return-to-pitch performance in stock trim. It's seated flush to the body, with three springs spanning the block and claw. Note that if you decide to tune the guitar to standard pitch (and use lighter-gauge strings), the system will require some re-adjusting.

Going sans amp with this guitar is a fun way to get in touch with its deep, muscular vibe, and the Kensrue StingRay is a vibration machine

SPECIFICATIONS

Dustin Kensrue StingRay

CONTACT ernieball.com
PRICE $2,999 street, custom hardshell case included

NUT WIDTH 1 ⅝"
NECK Select maple with sculpted heel and five-bolt joint
FRETBOARD Rosewood, 25 ½" scale, 10" radius (maple also available)
FRETS 22 high-profile, medium-width stainless steel
TUNERS Schaller M6-IND locking
BODY Okoume with TV Blond finish (also available in Dark Satin Tobacco Burst)
BRIDGE Music Man Modern tremolo with vintage-style bent-steel saddles
PICKUPS Custom Wound Music Man single-coil (neck) and humbucker (bridge)
CONTROLS Stacked passive volume and tone, 3-way pickup selector switch. Mode button bypasses the controls when pressed down to output the signal in mono or in stereo when a TRS cable is used
FACTORY STRINGS RPS Slinky, .011–.058
WEIGHT 8.10 lbs (as tested)
EXTRAS Silent Circuit eliminates noise
BUILT USA

KUDOS Excellent build quality, playability and sound. Pushbutton for selecting mono or stereo operation with controls bypassed
CONCERNS None

that resonates with authority and sustains beautifully. With the guitar plugged into a Fender Deluxe Reverb, a vintage Vibro-Champ or a 1996 Matchless C-30 2x12 combo — and with added grind provided by Earthquaker Hizumitas and EHX Ripped Speaker pedals [*see reviews,* GP *February 2022*] — the Kensrue delivered the goods whether cruising on the neck single-coil for girthy clean tones and fat overdriven textures, or summoning twangier and more open sounds with both pickups selected. The parallel wiring in the middle position enhances clarity — usually at the cost of some output — but it didn't diminish the sense of mass created by the single-coil and humbucker working in tandem to facilitate everything from bright, shimmering rhythm tones to bare-knuckles grind.

Things get interesting with the bridge setting, as you can dial the stacked controls as usual or press the sly little push button on the lower front of the pickguard to bypass the volume and tone controls and let the 'bucker rip at full output. This yields an amazingly potent tone that, depending on whether you're running though pedals or cranking the amplifier, cuts like a knife for solos and delivers tight bottom and a super-crisp attack. It's also very responsive to picking dynamics, which may simply be a benefit of the pickup's direct path to the output jack. At any rate, the "blower" button is a hip feature that allows for instant switching between two distinct lead and rhythm flavors. Alternately, in button-down mode and with an optional TRS cable plugged in, the circuit taps each pickup individually and sends the signals (also bypassing the controls for beefier tone) to the output in stereo. It's a handy way to use two amplifiers or channels in a modeling rig, as Kensrue does with a Line 6 Helix.

The Dustin Kensrue StingRay is an impressive guitar that stands out not only for its low-down sound but also for its ability to wring a ton of tones from its passive pickups while integrating active noise-reduction technology to facilitate switching from humbucker to single-coil sounds without an increase in hum. The Kensrue is definitely deeper than its simple controls would imply, and it presents a unique spin on the StingRay that earns it an Editors' Pick Award.

STRYMON

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

Compadre Dual-Voice Compressor and Boost

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

VIRTUALLY EVERY EFFECTS maker with a significant lineup offers a compressor of one flavor or another, but for many players this plethora of squeeze options leads not so much to a love-hate relationship with these pedals but more of a "love-meh." If you've tried a compressor or three but haven't found a need to keep one on your board, chances are this effect's potential benefit to your signal chain, and therefore tone, just hasn't quite clicked with you yet. On the other hand, if you have maintained one at the front of your chain, there's a good chance you're addicted to the thing and it's always on.

This preamble comes by way of laying some groundwork both for the strengths and potential underestimation of the Strymon Compadre. Part of the beauty of the compressor side of this dual compressor-boost pedal is its subtlety and unobtrusiveness, and therefore the way it makes it easy to discount its strengths in the first place. But we're getting ahead of ourselves, so let's dig into the form and function a little more first.

Billed as a dual-voice compressor and boost, the Compadre is a replacement of sorts for Strymon's discontinued OB.1, an even simpler two-button optical compressor with boost. In the new red box, Strymon has loaded an entirely analog VCA (Voltage-Controlled Amplifier) compressor with what it calls a "studio grade" Class-A JFET input that has settings for Studio and Squeeze, the latter a squishier, more overtly compressed vintage variation on the theme. Functions such as attack, decay, threshold and gain makeup are preset, so there are knobs for only compression and level, plus a clever dry control for blending your desired amount of un-effected signal into the mix parallel-compression style (which is great when, for example, you want a lot of squish but don't want to lose your attack and clarity).

The Boost side of the pedal carries a single knob for boost gain, along with a switch to select from three classic modes: Treble, Mid and Flat. Crucial to this side's versatility, however, is a boost type switch on the back panel for Clean or Dirty, a simple toggle that takes it from a linear boost to one with more clipping and coloration. As with most everything Strymon, even the versatile simplicity described thus far isn't enough. In addition to input and output jacks, the back panel carries a TRS volume input for connection to an external volume pedal, and a FAV/MIDI jack for use with a Strymon Favorite switch (to instantly call up a favorite preset) or a MIDI controller (to recall up to 300 presets and integrate with full MIDI-switching rigs). This panel also carries the included center-negative nine-volt DC adaptor input, and the pedal is selectable for true bypass, ultra-low-noise buffered bypass or auto bypass, which forces buffered bypass when a volume pedal is connected to the volume input. The Comp LED changes color from green to red to amber (respectively) when these modes are selected.

Tested with a Les Paul and a Stratocaster into a Friedman Dirty Shirley Mini combo and a blackface Bassman head and 2x12 cab, the Compadre quickly provided a plethora of great-sounding tone-shaping options that

SPECIFICATIONS

Compadre Dual-Voice Compressor and Boost
CONTACT strymon.net
PRICE $299 street

CONTROLS Comp: compression, level, dry, studio/squeeze switch; Boost: boost (gain), treble/mid/flat switch, clean/dirty switch.
EXTRAS TRS volume pedal input, FAV/MIDI jack, three bypass modes, center-negative 9V DC adaptor input (adaptor included)
SIZE 4" x 4.5" x 1.75" (excluding feet and knobs)
BUILT Assembled in USA

KUDOS High-quality and low-noise compression with two very usable modes plus a great-sounding multi-voiced boost, in a deceptively versatile pedal
CONCERNS Some users might enjoy built-in access to multiple presets

smoothly segued from subtle to essential. The compressor side is utterly adept at that "didn't know I couldn't live without it until I turned it off" thing, providing a distinct and appealing enlivening of the overall sound that can be easy to underappreciate until you throw the proverbial blanket back over the amp by switching it off.

Studio mode is lush and balanced, adding shimmer and bloom and the perception of extra life in your tone. It's much like hitting the signal with a good 1176 studio unit or similar, rather than imposing any dramatic squash. Squeeze mode might not sound quite as thick and juicy as some of the most popular pedal compressors out there — namely the revamped Ross, Dyna Comp and Dan Armstrong clones — but it provides a noticeable sag and swell even while it avoids extremes, which some players might find even more usable. I found it extremely pleasant and rather addictive. In either mode, this is an admirably quiet compressor circuit, too, which is to say it will of course still "grab" and seemingly amplify any noise ahead of it such as 60-cycle hum, but it induces very little self-noise into the signal in the process.

The Boost side does its thing as efficiently as any simple and well-made solid-state gain stage should, but the voicing and Clean/Dirty switches increase its potential exponentially and really make this another beast entirely. Treble mode is great for sparkling up dark amps, and Mid helps give single-coils more humbucker-like girth, but I expect players will keep it in Flat more often than not.

As such, the Clean setting ably delivers the relatively uncolored solo lift that many guitarists seek from such pedals. Switching to Dirty, however, adds a subtle yet tasty degree of clipping that enhances the harmonic depth slightly and aids the impression of pushed tubes, while taking the pedal into the low-gain overdrive zone with the Boost control advanced.

All in all, there's a ton to love about this otherwise unassuming and impressively versatile dual-pedal, which earns an Editors' Pick Award.

D'ADDARIO

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

Nexxus 360 Rechargeable Tuner

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

TUNING TECHNOLOGY REMAINS one of the bright lights in the guitar gear arena, especially on the purely acoustic side, where clip-on tuners rule the roost. D'Addario is always pushing the envelope and has achieved another breakthrough with the Nexxus 360, its first tuner to use a rechargeable lithium battery. Other features include full 360-degree rotation, a flexible pivot point, and a brilliant, bright and colorful LED screen.

The Nexxus 360 costs a bit more than similar tuners, but consider that a pair of Duracell lithium coin button batteries runs about six bucks online (and more in a store), and you'll start to realize how much money it can save over the long haul. The Nexxus comes with a USB cable, powers up quickly, and delivers about 24 hours of use on a full charge. That's about the same amount of running time you'll get from a three-volt lithium battery. The Nexxus is absolutely awesome around home. When it runs out, simply plug it into a USB power hub for a spell and you're back in business. It's a fine feeling to simply leave it on all the time without worry about drainage. In that regard, the tuner becomes an excellent note-recognition device, helping to decipher the fretboard at every turn. That's particularly handy when playing in open tunings, where the fretboard becomes much more mysterious.

On the road, well, the Nexxus 360 is simply one more thing in the electronic arsenal to be addressed at every stop, right along with your computer/iOS device, headphones/powered speaker, and of course, whatever vape or e-cigarette device you're toting. But it's sure nice not to worry about the battery failing at a critical moment, especially if you didn't have a chance to stop and plonk down the ducats for backups. If the Nexxus runs out of juice, simply use a phone adaptor and plug it into your pedalboard power for a refill. By the way, a little light indicates the level on power-up to help you know when the tuner needs a charge.

What's drawing power is the Nexxus 360's fantastically illuminated, crystal-clear, full-color LED screen. It works chromatically, with a semi-circle of 15 little LEDs surrounding a large note letter readout in the middle. Red on either side means very sharp or flat, yellow is closer, and three greens at the top mean you're good to go. Display and functionality are fabulous. The Nexxus 360 is fast, accurate and right to the point without bouncing all around, making it a cinch to home in on the desired pitch. Calibration can be adjusted via the two little buttons on either side of the power button, and those are the only three controls — nice and simple. When you hit and hold either the up or down button, calibration adjusts by as many cents as flash by, and upon release, three numbers flash sequentially to show where it landed, such as 4-4-0. The tuner has a range of 415 to 465 Hz.

The size and style of this tuner is much appreciated. Having tons of experience with myriad clip-on-style tuners, I can see why D'Addrio wound up with this here and now. Some older headstock tuners are large and indiscreet, and while micro-tuners are super stealthy, they're more difficult to read, and easy to misplace. The Nexxus 360 is a Goldilocks size — not too large or small, and just right for the job at hand. The clamp is nice and tight, and the tuner's omnidirectional capability and flexible fulcrum make it easy to find the best position for the player without distracting onlookers from the real show.

In summary, the size is right, the bright display is precise, the plastic casing feels durable, and the über-adjustable screen facilitates the line of sight. Rechargeability is convenient, saves money and waste, and is much safer. What the airlines say about those coin batteries is true: I used to keep a bunch of them in a plastic bag, with plastic wrap interwoven for separation. Lo and behold, one day when two or more of them must have been in contact, the bag spontaneously combusted! Luckily, I happened to be looking in that direction as the adjacent wooden CD storage tower started to smolder. This editor is all for looking back on single-use battery power as a bygone age. For all the reasons just stated, the D'Addario Nexxus 360 Tuner earns an Editors' Pick Award.

SPECIFICATIONS

Nexxus 360 Rechargeable Tuner
CONTACT daddario.com
PRICE $29

FEATURES 360-degree rotating screen, full-color LED display with high-powered backlight, 24 hours use on a full charge
EXTRAS USB charging cable

KUDOS Rechargeable is economical and less wasteful. Fabulous display is fast and accurate. Fantastic flexibility
CONCERNS Only that a troubadour must remember to keep it handy and charge regularly along with other devices on the road

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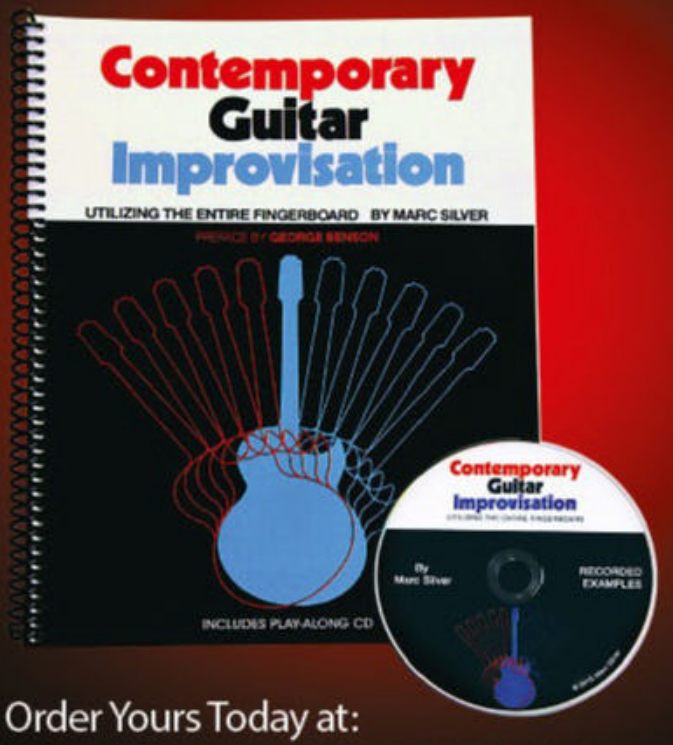

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Sammy Hagar and Eddie Van Halen onstage in 1986

How I Wrote...

"Right Now"

Sammy Hagar reveals how inspiration struck him and Ed for Van Halen's enduring hit.

BY JOE BOSSO

"IT'S A SONG that's had some real resonance," Sammy Hager says of "Right Now," the sing-along rock anthem from Van Halen's 1991 album, *For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge*. "Sometimes you're able to write a song that expresses how you feel, and it strikes a nerve with other people and they say, 'Yes. That's exactly how I feel, too.' For a songwriter, that's an incredible response to your work."

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Hagar cites "Right Now" as being "a really great example of how Eddie Van Halen and I could collaborate. He had it musically, and I had it lyrically." But the process wasn't always smooth sailing. As the singer-guitarist recalls, during early album writing sessions, Van Halen played him a piano part — one the guitarist had been toying with since 1983 — to see if he would spark to it. "I liked it, but I didn't know what I could do with it," he says. "Eddie was hearing it like the song 'Feelin' Alright?'" Legend has it he wanted Joe Cocker, who famously covered that Dave Mason–composed Traffic song, to sing an early version of the tune. "But I didn't hear it that way," Hagar continues. "We tried to get it going, but nothing felt right. We just sort of left it and he played me something else, and that became 'Poundcake,'" the album's opening track.

Several weeks later, Hagar was laying on the beach and trying to avoid going to the studio. "It was such a beautiful day," he says, "and I thought to myself, I don't want to go anywhere else. I just want to be right here, *right now*.'" Immediately, he knew he had something that could fit Ed's piano idea — only it would take six months for the two songwriters to put their ideas together. "Eddie kept playing me the piano part, trying to inspire me," he recalls. "I heard him play it probably 100 times. Then one day I started singing to it, and I had it. Everything fit and made sense. The lyrics came to me, and I told Eddie, 'This thing's written. Let's record.'"

UNCHAINED... IN PAJAMAS

As the two were already at Van Halen's 5150 home studio, they didn't bother making a demo. "I don't think we even had a cassette of it," Hagar says. "We just went straight into recording." First, Ed played piano to a click, and then Alex Van Halen overdubbed drums. Hagar doesn't recall bassist Michael Anthony taking part in the initial sessions ("I'm pretty sure Eddie played bass on this one"), but he remembers everybody gathered around a mic to scream "right now" backings to his lead vocal. "The whole thing came together like magic," he says. "The tune was happening."

Ed's stellar guitar solo was something of a last-minute final touch. "Usually, Eddie had solos pretty locked down before we started recording," Hagar says, "but on this song he winged it. He came out of the house in pajamas and slippers, went into the studio and played whatever came out. And as you might expect, it was pretty damn great." Hagar recalls that Van Halen played a couple of passes, both of which "sounded awesome, because as everybody knows, Eddie never played a bad solo." In the end, it was decided to comp the two solos together.

"ED CAME OUT OF THE HOUSE IN PAJAMAS AND SLIPPERS, WENT INTO THE STUDIO AND PLAYED WHATEVER CAME OUT"

RIGHT NOW... YOUR VIDEO IS A HIT

The second he heard a playback of the finished recording, Hagar knew "Right Now" was a hit. "The chorus, that iconic piano part. It was in the bag," he says. "The song would have been great if I sang about cat food."

However, he was less than convinced about the song's high-concept music video, in which director Mark Fenske depicted societal images behind big block topical statements such as, "Right now, our government is doing things we think other countries do." Says Hagar, "I thought, I've finally written some lyrics that aren't about sex and partying. I wrote some really meaningful messages about how to live your life. I wanted my lyrics to be what you saw on the screen."

In the end, he acquiesced to Fenske, and the video became a phenomenon, receiving constant play on MTV and ultimately winning Video of the Year at 1992's MTV Awards. "It took me a while to come around to what Mark wanted to do, and now I can say that the video is brilliant," Hagar says. "I was totally wrong. I thought it was a crazy idea, but sometimes those are the ideas that are the best." He laughs. "Hell, I have a whole career that's based around crazy ideas."

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